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INVITATION TO THE DANCE:
CHILDREN "SELECTING" BOOKS

by

JANET ELIZABETH THOMAS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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David Dilon
Supervisor

James Blakey

Hugo Van Tigchelen

Date October 15, 1983

Dedicated to teachers and children

Little faces
All look up to mine
Expect to see
All gracious
All accepting,
Understanding,

Want so much to see me
Looking back, held by their eyes.
Hoping to see
Themselves in my smile.

ABSTRACT

The "invitation to the dance" is a silent unspoken communication which brings a child at a particular time and place to choose a particular book. The book, a partner, joins the child in a dance called reading.

This metaphor of dance is the departure and point of return in this study of young children actively engaged in choosing books in school and public libraries. In an attempt to describe, the writer makes reference to not only actual experiences, but also draws on personal memories and literature of scholarly, fictional and autobiographical nature. The attempt is to open avenues of thought by describing the settings and people within libraries, and some of the multifaceted interactions which take place, as much as possible with an openness to the child's view of the world.

The study makes no conclusions, but instead entreats the readers to discover their own understandings (as readers will do in any case) with an eye to more harmony between teacher and child, not just in choosing books, but in cohabiting a classroom each day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My husband, John, forces me to admit the lack of numerical data within this study, which would be more to his inclination. But I am in no way coerced to acknowledge and state appreciation for his continuous support and loving ways, as well as his artful, delightful and enlightening conversation on this and countless other subjects. He enriches my life and world.

I am indebted to the constant encouragement and to the lively interest and ability of my advisor, David Dillon, who is a teacher in the best sense of the word.

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PART I

I. BEFORE WE BEGIN

As I recall the events of my own childhood and my work with children in elementary classrooms, I am filled with a sense that, like many adults, I gain distance from my immediate experience in life, and that this gain is actually a loss. Authors most often express this feeling in sentimental terms, a longing for the intensity of childhood "raptures" lost. It is not a sentimental "rekindling" of essential experience that I seek. Instead, I search for some understanding of my own experience, and ways of co-habiting and understanding the life world of those youngsters in my care.

I come to understand that language expedites my distancing from life-world experiences, as Britton (1977b:41-42) says:

> To speak is to 'articulate,' over a wide range of that word's meanings; both to joint and to join; to provide with a framework; to knit, perhaps, or to weave--and the web, as Robert Graves has suggested is a cool one--a means of lessening the intensity of experience:
>
> Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,
> How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
> How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,
> How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by,
>
> But we have speech to chill the angry day,
> And speech, to dull the rose's cruel scent,
> We spell away the overhanging night,
> We spell away the soldiers and the fright.
>
> There's a cool web of language winds us in ...

Yet, I know deep within myself, that words can increase and develop my understanding, and often serve to re-awaken my closeness to and perception of real-life or lived experience.

> But so with all, from babes that play
> At hide-and-seek to God afar,
> So all who hide too well away
> Must speak and tell us where they are.
>
> (Frost, 1978:251)

Perhaps, as teachers and human beings, or more properly, human beings who are teachers, language itself does not separate us so greatly from our experience as does our failure to "listen" to those who "speak and tell us where they are." Such speaking is not in terms of highly developed public skills, but the common, private, unmomentous, sometimes unspoken conversations that occur throughout our daily involvement with people around us. We can "listen" to what we see in actions, to those unspoken words we all understand:

> A friend approached me today,
> I had never met him before.
> We shared a lifetime of smiles.
> I never needed to ask what for.
>
> (Author anonymous, cited by Montagu, 1981:179)

As I attempt to listen in this way in libraries in the course of this study, I am struck by the purposeful, active involvement of individuals. I am hesitant to disturb it:

> ... The star pattern of
> the snow looks perfect as it falls on my hand.
> I wonder how it can be so lovely.
> I touch it carefully with my other hand.
> But then, as if I have broken its secret,
> it melts, leaving a tiny, clear drop of water.
>
> (Takashima, 1971)

I am afraid to intrude, to ask questions, to interfere with what is going on around me. Intuitively I feel I have to wait, to wait for the circle to enclose and include me. I cannot come to understand what is "real" for young children or myself by analysis of answers to carefully composed and posed questions. I have come to understand Hugh Prather's (1970) statement:

> ... I also sense that I am misusing the idea of being real whenever I discover myself anxiously weighing my words and actions, that is, whenever I am being very careful to be "real." Calculation does not enter into being real. Being real is more a process of letting go than it is the effort of becoming. I don't really have to become me, although at times it feels this way--I am already me. And that is both the easiest and the hardest thing for me to realize.

So, I too begin to trust myself, to let go, to listen and understand that I am already myself, an that only in this way can I come to even a fragile understanding of the life-world of the children who are in my care. In a sense I choose to resist analysis of either my reasons for wishing to understand children's experiences as readers; or analysis of why the children understand or relate as they do. Prather (1970) voices this same concern:

> Analysis is condemnation. I ask myself: "Why do you want to do that?" This question is malevolent. I am seeking a motive that I have already prejudged unworthy of me. Questioning my motives leads to a decision to thwart the desire I had. A healthier approach would be to accept the desire as mine and simple seek to learn its direction, seek to clarify, rather than judge it.

Instead of relentlessly examining my motives and the children's I choose to "seek to learn its direction," and to use language in whatever way I can to illuminate experiences witnessed and shared by myself and others; sharing understanding with my fellows.

My fellow teachers and I are so caught up in innumerable daily episodes of classroom life, that we come to rely on our intuitive reactions in our relationships with children. Rarely is this way of relating acknowledged or recognized. Teachers, in examining this facet of themselves, this attempt to understand children, may discover that:

> Phenomenological knowledge is 'practical' in the sense that it may contribute to a teacher's pedagogic orientation; the wisdom to act with self-inspired pedagogic sense in educational situations (Van Manen, 1979:26).

The self-inspired sense Van Manen speaks of comes only from the fact that we all have experience we can share. There are great commonalities in human experience, notwithstanding the differences in individuals. The knowing, the self-inspired sense, grows out of experience, and we return to that experience for a feeling of "truth." Knowing, really knowing, is the illusive untraceable echo that sounds deep within us when we hear or see something that "fits" within our own cumulative experience and knowledge. So, the sharing of experience depends on "telling where we are" as individuals, all the while relating to the common knowledge of others, a knowledge which we <u>know</u> exists. And we wait for the look of knowing on the face of those with whom we share.

My sharing in this study depends on the language used to describe experiences, so the writing of this study becomes of primary importance. The tone, intent, and meaning of this study can only be embodied within its writing. Hunsberger (1981), in her phenomenological study of adult reading, states that her writing <u>is</u> her research. Prather (1970) speaks of writing in these terms:

> As I write I am in a state of learning, becoming, arriving, and not in a state of knowing and having arrived ... but at times it goes even further and is a cry for help.

In the writing of this study, there is no state of "knowing and having arrived." Often a "cry for help" escapes my lips through a written question for further consideration by myself, by my reader. I cannot see the look of knowing, of shared understanding on your face, so the question hangs in the air.

The intent of this study, illumination and sharing of experience, does not allow me as a writer simply to express myself. I must speak to others in whatever way I may to facilitate understanding. I am familiar with the disposition of some academic and scholarly writing. Too often such writing places demands on the reader, demands that limit understanding.

So I look for guidance. I read warnings, cautions to a writer in my situation. They are, for the most part, warnings. It is much easier, in our world, to tell what does not work and therefore should not be done, than to suggest what writing should be. Perhaps this is because writing, even as it distances us from experience, is for some, like the poet Archibald MacLeish, an attempt to know the world, not by proving, but "directly, as a man knows apple in mouth" (Cited by May, 1975). This kind of undertaking can have no set of guidelines, no recipe but that obvious one most aptly stated by George Orwell, "Let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about" (Cited by Holmes, 1976:74).

The "should-nots" make good sense. We know by reading where writing fails, but some people have the gift of portraying vividly how writers

transgress. Barzun, for instance, denounces jargon, the ever-present "grey dust of easy abstractions," which

> ... deny the doer and replace him by an activity ... process (a favorite word) which is therefore unchanging, eternal, and which gives the user the sense of being 'scientific.' ... It sounds as if it's meaning were not only lucid, but important (Cited by Holmes, 1976, p.81).

Objecting to a tendancy to classify rather than to describe which she observes, Holmes (1976:79) says "there is more reality in a blade of grass than in the concept of chlorophyll."

So, classifying and abstracting are not the tools of a writer of description and do not fit with the intent of this study. In any writing, undue repetition is insensitive to the reader, and ponderous treatment can break down even that which is at first intriguing and immediately understood. George Seferis (1960:42) writes in a few words the frustration that may occur for a reader:

> As you are writing
> The ink grows less
> The sea increases.

In this study, I choose to illuminate, not by classifying, explaining, reducing, and voicing over-riding and simplistic statements, but by describing more of the "blade of grass than the concept of chlorophyll," and to offering to my fellows a sense of "the apple in mouth."

Curiously enough, the writing of this paper comes to resemble the kind of activity it seeks to describe--browsing, looking for, choosing books in the library. At times an area is opened up and glanced into briefly, as one would open a book momentarily and then reshelve it, perhaps to come back to it another day. The glimpse is a speculative one

serving not to hold thought but to open a possible avenue, now or in the future. Other times the writing is more like a leisurely detailed look at some beautiful illustrations, luxuriating in its miniscule features, seeing how they relate to the whole, but not always explicitly stating the relationship. Like a child or any person looking through books I have needs, interests, desires, and so in my research and writing I pick up certain volumes and return them to their shelves where others might wish to read the whole book. This I cannot account for or change in my human-ness. I an indebted to Max Van Manen, who suggests to me this likeness of what I have written to the subject I encounter, and is it not intriguing that there may be metaphor within the very kind of writing that one does?

So this writing for me is more an exploration in itself, no conclusions, no fact finding mission. I can only open new avenues of thought for myself and hopefully, if my writing serves my purpose, for my reader as well.

I begin and continue my study into the future, beyond this interim writing in the hope that there is, dwelling within human experience, a binding through life. In Wordsworth's often quoted words:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man,
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!
> The Child is the Father of the Man
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.
>
> (1958:101).

PART II

II. THE INVITATION TO THE DANCE

In singularly remarkable and yet unpretentious ways we, as children, are introduced to the dance, invited and enticed into the dance we call reading. The invitation, for many, comes in stories and books themselves. If we choose to accept the invitation, books become our partners and we begin to move together through the space of time and world. At first we move haltingly, timidly, as those first met have a way of doing. We may nudge or momentarily lose our partner, or our partner may, for a moment move across the floor to the sound of inner music. In the innovation and improvisation of movement in personal harmony with the music about us, in the beginnings of the dance, there is an excitement of things that might come to be.

Blair is only one, but he has already encountered books and reacts to them with delight. His parents have a little game with him. They ask him how big he is and he raises his arms high over his head so his parents can chime in, "sooooo big!" Blair listens and watches as his mother reads a book to him. When the phrase "sooooo early" is read, Blair raises his hands over his head, giggling in anticipation of the game. Little Blair is not in step with his partner yet, but he knows something about the dance.

As fluent adult readers we have come to gain grace and composure with our book-partners, and eventually the sweeping and fluid movement

obscures any remnants of footsteps and sometimes even the memories of our first attempts to dance.

So we can only speculate as mature readers. "What is it like?" Can a book take on some aspects of the context in which it is introduced to us? It appears to in Sartre's (1972:192) vivid description of his mother reading.

> The story was secondary: it was the link between her soliloquies. All the while he was talking, we were alone and private ... I never could believe that a whole book could have been written to feature this episode in our profane life, which smelt of soap and eau-de-cologne.

A child's senses do seem more open to the world around him, more disposed to assimilate sensory awareness, awareness of touch, sound, smell and taste, on an equivalent basis with sight. Those of us who know little children feel this is true, but can we again understand, or come to understand, that a book at bedtime could mean slow-warming smoothness of sheets, a soft voice, gentle wind playing with the window curtains in the pale dusky night-smells-and-sounds of midsummer? Agnes deMille (1978:38), in her memoirs remembers this way.

> Once, when I was five, I waited after supper in my night clothes for Father to tell his bedtime story. A pale dissolved moon mounted softly in the waning east. I stood by the nursery window watching the trees press closer. Then came the voice from down there, where I had been told never to go alone. I ran and put my head under the pillow so I would not hear. But presently I felt Father's footstep on the stair.
>
> He opened the door and looked in holding a lighted lamp in his hand, and I was safe.
>
> "You came just is time," I whispered, "just in time."
>
> "All right, all right," he said. "I'm here."
>
> I fell asleep remembering the good tobacco odor of his neck and the human reassurance of his chin.

Hurlimann (1977:9) recalling her childhood says

> memories emerge clearly from the mists, though like islands in an ocean that is still dark. As they take shape, I gradually connect them with remembered sounds and smells.

I will always remember the smell of the bookmobile that came to the end of my block. It was always too warm in winter, steamy windows, with snow from boots melting in puddles on the floor and making the atmosphere inside so humid. The smell, I learned (as an adult) came from the heater used in the bus, but that matters not. That smell came as part of an experience that for me cannot be disassembled or interpreted. It simply was, and a whole parcel of memories are tied together by the remembrance of that sensation. The books I explored, chose and borrowed were only part of this, and yet came to be, and remained, as my partners outside of this context. Like Alice James (1974:195),

> ... my memory is packed with little bits which have not been wiped out by great ones ... and as I go along the childish impressions of light and colour come crowing back into my mind and with them the expectant, which then palpitated within me, lives for a ghostly moment.

My little "just four" niece sits in the family room at her grandma and grandpa's house. She has pulled a stack of little books from grandma's toybox and has spent some time engrossed, looking at each one in turn. She says to her uncle, who sits nearby: "I <u>have</u> to read them. I haven't been here in a long time." Thus can books be integrated within a setting.

Not only can books take on aspects of the context in which they are introduced, becoming part and parcel of the music around us, but as "stories" the books can be integrated into the life of the child,

allowing dancers to move more in harmony. Hurlimann (1977:3) describes the landscape and features of her childhood environment, the woods (the Hasenwalchen), the river, the park, and how stories came to life and changed for her in this setting:

> For a long time this landscape provided the background to all stories and fairy tales the child heard, as well as to her own experiences. If a story has a wood in it, it took place, of course, in the Hasenwalchen; if as in the Frog Prince, there was a mysterious well involved, then the Grand Duke's park was the setting. When her mother read aloud Peter Pan ... the little girl imagined Peter Pan floating down the river Ilm in his bird's nest, under the shade of the overhanging trees ... illustrations to that tale of a nocturnal park merged into the real park she knew; they were the first, and for long, the only works of art to instill a certain sense of terror into her.

Later, Hurlimann continues to tell how story merges with her life as a child:

> Her mother had given her a small basket containing something to eat, probably a snack for her father. It was all rather like Little Red Riding Hood's mother in the fairy tale, sending her pretty child off into the wood to visit her sick grandmother.
>
> Her mother may have said, "Keep on the pavement like a good girl, Bettina, so you don't get run over, and don't lose anything out of the basket, and mind you come home soon." She did not mention any wolf. So off the little girl went, walking along the very edge of the pavement, carefully balanced between permitted and forbidden ground (pp.5-6).

It is interesting to think of, in Leonard Cohen's (1968) words, "one's part in a legend."

Story

She tells me a child built her house
One Spring afternoon,
but that the child was killed
crossing the street.

She says she read it in the newspaper,
that at the corner of this and this avenue
a child was run down by an automobile.

Of course I do not believe her.
She has built the house herself,
hung the oranges and coloured beads in the doorways,
crayoned flowers on the walls,
She has made the paper things for the wind,
collected crooked stones for their shadow in the sun,
fastened yellow and dark balloons to the ceiling.

Each time I visit her
she repeats the story of the child to me
I never question her, It is important
to understand one's part in a legend.

I take my place
among the paper fish and make-believe clocks,
naming the flowers she has drawn ...

So child-dancer and book partner begin to move together within the music of a particular time and space.

Children begin to choose books, in some mysterious way, much as the inexplicable way we come to desire certain partners for dance--not explainable, not at all, yet we seem to know what we need. Others may indeed comment on reasons for our choices in books, in dance partners, lovers, friends or life-styles, and yet as individuals are we not wordless to "explain?" Our search for reasons is too difficult, too dry. It does seem that in all these choices, though, that there is something 'there' for us, in Alice James words (1974:195)

> What one reads, or rather all that comes to us is surely only of interest and value in proportion as we find ourselves therein, form given to what was vague, what slumbered stirred to life.

My niece brings me a book, her favorite "right now" and we curl up together to read in an oversized easy chair. I am so puzzled by her choice; the book is strange, tortuous, a tale of a search. I keep getting lost along the way. However, as I turn one page, Angie props herself up, poised, already examining the full page illustration beside

the text I am about to read. The text tells of a land of memory where one can return to visit grandmas and grandpas. The children in the story cry when they realize they must leave to continue their search, but the grandpa calls out, saying that he will always be with them in their memory. Angie presses her finger gently to the illustration and names the characters in the picture, and finally is ready for us to continue. Her grandpa died the week before this incident. Later she asks "How does grandpa know he's dead?"

We too "find ourselves," our concerns, our world in books. In this respect, how telling are the deceptively simple words in children's books. As I read Alison Utley's (1975:30) little book, a children's book about some animals who find a book near their home, how true the words ring!

> "A book?" he continued. "I like books, especially picture books. Am I in it?"
>
> "No," spluttered hare. "N-n-not yet."

Am I in it? Is this not the question we all ask? The hen in this little story looks at the drawings of one of her species in the book. She <u>is</u> in it physically, yet:

> "It's not me," she spluttered, cackling loudly. "It doesn't speak or move." (p.28).

There is only something in the book for us if it speaks to us directly by some means in some way. Child and adult know that the music is the dance and the dance is the music.

Montagu (1981:19) believes that to really dance, and enjoy the dance,

> One must allow the music to enter one's bones, to respond to it with all the faculties it calls for, for it is an art of many sensory dimensions.

It seems, in the beginning; that the music around the child is strong, so strong that the book, a partner in fledgling dance, is simply "there." At this time, the dance is more a response to the notes that sound about us and our reactions to these subtle harmonies, than coordinated movement of and between two partners.

So the dance has begun long before children come to school where I see them every day as teacher ...

III. A PARTICULAR INVITATION

We don't always remember our first conceptions of books, or libraries full of books.

When you first meet a new situation, you can only react to what it looks to be. What do books look like to a child--especially stacked on shelves, row on row? Jean Paul Sartre (1972:190) explains his first perspective on books:

> I began my life as I shall not doubt end it: among books. In my grandfather's study, they were everywhere ... Even before I could read, I already revered these raised stones; upright or leaning, wedged together like bricks on the library shelves or nobly spaced like avenues of dolmens ... I sometimes got close enough to observe these boxes which opened like oysters and I discovered the nakedness of their internal organs, pale, dank, slightly blistered pages, covered with small black veins, which drank ink and smelt of mildew.

Hurlimann (1977:8), a daughter of a bookshop owner, then publisher, speaks of her first visit "all on her own" to her father's bookshop.

> His daughter was fascinated. The place gave her the impression of a well ordered realm to which for the moment she, too, belonged.
>
> The boundaries of this realm were formed by walls of bookshelves reaching right up to the ceiling. There was a ladder, so that you could get at the top books. This ladder was a most alluring temptation ... carefully, she climbed the ladder, passing row after row of books printed with good ink on good quality paper. She sniffed them, looking down at the shop from up above and thinking that this was as beautiful as the Hasenwaldchen (where the smell was of leaves and mushrooms). From this moment, the smell of books was part of her life. She did not yet recognize its significance, but on encountering it in later life, she would always remember her childhood, her father's bookshop, and his study.

As a child, I too recall the mysterious alignments of books on shelves; my mother re-arranging them and teaching me to do the same.

Books liked to face the same way on the shelf and they liked to be with books of the same type, very close. And, it was the same at the bookmobile, where the little people's books were on the bottom shelf and the big people's were on the top ones, so that big people reached up high over me as I knelt to search the bottom shelf.

As I observe children in school and public libraries, it becomes evident to me that I have, through my years of teaching, taken for granted that there is only one way of viewing the library and the books therein. Again, I refer to the animal's discussion in Alison Utley's (1975:17) little book for children. They notice the differences between what they see about them, and what the "lady"-illustrator has portrayed in the book they have found.

> "Here's Wise Owl's tree," said Grey Rabbit. "She hasn't seen Wise Owl's bell and his door."
>
> "She doesn't go very near," explained Hare. "She doesn't notice all the leaves and ladybirds and insects."
>
> So they flipped the pages over with their furry paws.

In my observations in school and public libraries I become determined to "go very near," to "notice all the leaves and ladybirds and insects" that are within my view.

> The truth is that children are people. They are people just as adults are people. They are not small adults because they have not had as much experience with living and with people as adults and because many of their needs--physical, mental and emotional--are different. Yet they are not a race apart. They may have their own special dreams, their own visions, their own fears, their own triumphs, and some special knowledges all their own (Karl, 1970:3-4).

As adults we have some special knowledges all our own, but we seem to think that they exist in the child's world as they do in ours. At

this point I am reminded of an expedition with my kindergarten class to the top of the Alberta Government Telephone Tower, in downtown Edmonton. The guide on the viewing floor pointed below to the roof of the old Hotel MacDonald, saying that at one time, that hotel was the tallest building in all of Edmonton. The sage response-question of one little guy was "Well, what happened to it?" Another child pointed to the air conditioning pools on top of a nearby office tower, wondering aloud, "What are those for?" A classmate leaned over, look and said most seriously, "That's where they make their coffee."

> If children sometimes seem strange and remote, if their ideas seem odd and revolutionary, the reason is not that they are not seeing the same world an adult sees, but they do not see it through the same lens of experience as an adult; the experiences of the child create for him a lens with a different focal length (Karl, 1970:3-4).

Take, for example, the library cards in the back pockets of library books in our school library. As adults we all know that these are necessary elements of circulation in the "system" of the library. They serve to keep account of which child has which book and when it should be returned.

The children have different "systems" in which these cards serve a purpose.

Firstly, the blank spaces on the library cards are places where a child can publicly display new prowess in printing that most important of words, one's name. Different writing instruments are occasionally available in the library for this purpose as pencils continually "walk off" and pens or pencil crayons are sometimes left out for use. At the sign-out table in one school library, this is often the case and as one

little boy in grade one moves to the table he is quick to notice this fact. "Goodie!" he says, turning to another child, "today we get to use a pen." Another day, a child announces to his fellows: "Oh boy, pencil crayons today!"

Many times I notice children looking at the cards, pulling them from pockets inside the back cover as they make their selection. Slowly, I realize that these cards are part of a different system for some children. For some, the cards are a personal record of books they have read. The little grade one class librarian, who industriously stamps her classmate's books and keeps the cards in order, now shelves some of the returned books. She calls across the bookshelf to a classmate, "I'm taking this one. I saw it before but ... you can tell it ... I saw it first, but I'm taking it again." The book, Little Monster's Bed Time Book, opens to the inside of the back cover for evidence that what she says is true ... and yes, the little librarian's name is on the top line of the card, even as it sits in its pocket, safe and sound.

For other children, the cards appear to be a system of recommendation. Many of the children look at the cards in the back of the books as they browse, selecting books to borrow. One boy chooses a book off the shelf, looks immediately at the card, and marches right over to a fellow student a few shelves away. After a short conference with Kevin who had the book before, the boy signs the card and "takes out" the book.

Another child surveys a card as I happen by. I ask what she is looking for. She is seeing if another person has really taken this book out.

Two grade ones are at the sign out table. One small fellow says "Jay had this book before." He turns the card over and glances at the other names that are listed.

Another boy looks at a card at the sign out desk. "Oh yeah! Someone's taken this four times in a row."

So it appears that the children in the library are able to use the sign out system for their own purposes. The return wagon, where children from various classes deposit their previous books at book exchanges, also has a different role for the children. Many of the children come to the wagon first when selecting books rather than selecting books from the various shelves around the library. Why wouldn't other children select books that might interest <u>them</u> too? In the public library children utilized the re-shelving trollies and the books which had been taken off the shelves and placed on table tops. One preschooler in the public library quietly sits beside her father at one of the low tables in the children's selection when the librarian rolls in a return cart and leaves it next to the little girl. She taps her dad's arm gently and points to the book cart. She smiles. Dad motions, "Yes, you can." Quietly she picks a book off the cart, seemingly at random, and moves over to a bench to read it. She repeats this choosing off the cart twice.

I mention these examples of the children's own systems within the systems developed by adults as some of the "leaves and ladybirds and insects" that are seen where one "goes very near" in the library. Other physical aspects of the library appear to be viewed differently by the children who hunt there for books that "fit." It is interesting to note

that neat, tightly packed shelves are avoided by many of the small children. One little boy in the public library looks at some of the juvenile books which are tightly, oh so tightly packed on the shelf. His arms form a loop behind his back, hands clasped together as he crooks his neck, head to one side, so that he can just see the edges of the larger books which hang over the shelves. In this way he can look at part of the covers of some of the books without pulling any out. His posture and body language tell me that he knows he can never get a book back in on that shelf if he does take one out. I watch another kindergarten student facing the same situation. As he pries the books apart and attempts to return one back to its place, there is a strained look on his face indicative of the determination and concentration required for the task.

In the children's sections in public libraries, and in school libraries, many shelves are adult sized. Children continue to be small bodies in a big person's world. Many times adults look at children's books from the top shelves, which are in their easy grasp, while their smaller friends look up to see whatever they can. The card catalogue in the school libraries is too high for most of the primary aged children to reach, even though their adept use of this tool is demonstrated to me when I pull the shelves down. Tall revolving wire paperback stands become merry-go-rounds in the hands of kindergarteners. They are of no particular use for them in terms of display of books. I think about this as I watch them playing together around the spinning stand one day. Imagine if adults were faced with a stand of books, say, twelve or thirteen feet high. Wouldn't we give it a spin out of exasperation?

However they are displayed, there are many books in a library, and librarians and children organize them in some way.

Sartre comments on his concept of organization in his grandfather's study.

> For a long while, the works of the top shelf remained out of my reach (p.194) ... I would pick a volume at random, from behind the desk, on the last but one shelf, A-Bello, Bello-Ch or Ci-D, Mele-Po or Pr-Z (these associations of syllables had become proper names indicating areas of human knowledge; there was the Ci-D region and the Pr-Z region, with their fauna and flora, their towns, their great men and their battles) (1972:195).

The young children in school libraries are first introduced to the collection of "Easy" books or "Easies" which are marked with an "E" and the letter of the author's surname on the spine of each book. The "Easies" are stacked alphabetically by author's surname. Within this organization it appears that children have their own ways of organizing.

It seems to be a matter of some confusion to several children the "Easy" sounds so much like "EB." On several occasions I note children searching the rather large EB section of the easy books. (After all, there are more surnames beginning with this letter than say Q, U, V, W, or Z!) One little girl begins an earnest search of the EB shelf near me. I ask her "What kind of book are you looking for?" She says, "The Little Bunny Who Wanted Wings. Is it an EB book?"

A little girl comes near me, moving along slowly on crutches. To herself, but loud enough that I can hear she says "I can't find a book." With some difficulty she stamps her foot. Louder this time, "I can't find a book." Stamps foot again. I ask "What kind of book are you looking for?" She says "An easy reading book." "What is a book like that like?" I ask. "Has words that are easy to read." At this point,

another little girl who has been listening offers: "This is an EB--look, (points to spine) ... Clifford." The little girl on crutches is doubtful, "I'm looking for an easy one." The book is still offered: "Clifford is easy."

Another grade one child has found a region within the library some time ago and asks me to help her in locating it again. "Can you help me find some books?" she asks. "I can try." She continues, "Do you know where those books are with the little guy on the side? ... You know, on the side." (points at the spine of a book on the shelf in front of us.) I am puzzled, "Gee, I don't know which books you mean. Sorry. Can you explain more?" She repeats her description of the books, but I admit that I am at a loss. Later this little girl comes running up, book in hand. "Here's one, see?" (She points to the miniature Cat in the Hat on the spine of the Dr. Seuss book.) "'Cept this one's too hard. There are more ..." (she leads me around the corner) "... see?" (She points at more of the 'little guys.') "I have that one at home, and let me see, that one ... I don't have at home. There's another one ... Fox in Socks."

In the young children's vocabulary, if the Easy section lives up to the name it is given, the other books, the non-fiction ones must be ... of course! They are "Hard."

I watch as a serious first grader pushes out the books on shelves so that their spines appear even. Before this, she was pushing them all in, until the librarian suggested an alternative way. She notices me. "See what I'm doing? I'm helping Mrs. _____." As she moves along the

shelves she approaches another library browser. She continues to comment to me, "I'm going to do that hard part, too," (she points to the non-fiction shelves) "so I'll have lots of work to do." She looks at the girl beside her, "Better move out 'cause I'm going to push them out."

There is also some confusion about the location of certain "classifications" of books that may reside in all areas of the library:

Two little girls meet in the Easy section:

"Trina, there's farm books there." (She points to Non-Fiction.)

"Mrs. _____ said they were here." She points to the shelf where she stands.

"No, there's more over there."

"Oh, Okay." They move off together in their search.

It is important to know your way around the library and to recognize its strange routines. Nobody likes to be a stranger in any land for long. Two young patrons of the public library attempt to leave without signing out their books. Their mom shouts across at them "Wait, wait! You have to sign them out!" The librarian laughs as the children look quite astonished and sheepishly return, looking at the people around them for reactions.

A dad joins his little daughter at a low table in the children's section of the public library. He reads an adult book while she looks about and rearranges the little purse that she carries over her arm. Suddenly she says to her dad: "How come everyone's so quiet?" Dad replies, "It's a library, you have to be very quiet." She looks at me, then sits down at a little bench beside an inclined reading top and looks through a book. She laughs or murmurs quietly to herself from time to

time. Later: "Dad!?" she says/asks. "Shhhh," he motions. She comes closer, bringing a book to dad, and he says "You know you can only take three." She replies. "I read them, put them there and then bring them back." He says "That's a good idea." Shortly thereafter they leave hand in hand.

Procedures are a worry sometimes, especially to a child who enjoys taking out books and is afraid that through a lapse in returning he may lose this privilege. One storytime the librarian is well into The Mysterious Tadpole and the tadpole has just finished eating a cheeseburger! The grade two children laugh appreciatively and the librarian/reader pauses momentarily. In this pause, one little guy bursts out in a steady stream: (has he been worried about approaching this issue?) "Mrs. _____, I wasn't here last week and I didn't bring my book back. Can I still take one out today? Can I still take one out today?" Mrs. _____ looks confused, then amused. "You're pretty good about bringing them back ... let's talk after the story." The little guy is visibly relieved. His little shoulders relax, and the story continues. At the end of the story, he asks "Can I take it?"

Children who move to a new school are full of "can I?" questions in the school library. They have to know the rules, and the routines, where to put the stamped cards, how many books, or magazines or records they can take out, who does what jobs and why. Ashley Montagu (1981:173) comments:

> For the infant, the world is a mystery, an unknown territory that must be explored and mapped. Mapping follows exploration, and by this means the child builds up the longitude and latitude and compass points of his relational world and gives

> it both pattern and form, by means of which he can negotiate his way through what gradually becomes for him a terra cognita.

Some children get very caught up in the organization of the school library. These children seek out the jobs of re-shelving the books, organizing the cards and learning the mysteries of the Dewey Decimal System. Younger children may enjoy stacking the books themselves, as in my earlier example where a little girl evens up the edges of the book on the shelves. Again, Ashley Montagu (1981:151) commments:

> The organizing trait expresses itself in more extended form quite early in childhood in the form of the collection, arrangement, and classification of various objects, and in the strong tendency to put things in their proper order. It is a trait that is often mistaken for "tidiness," when in fact it is quite another thing. The possessor of a well-organized mind may be quite untidy in his personal habits.

Montagu speaks in this way of the need to organize which he feel is one of the neotonous traits of a child. Although I see a great deal of this organizing behavior on the part of children in libraries, I am not so determined to classify it as a "need to organize" or even to tie it in with Montagu's other "neotonous traits" such as the "need to work." Instead I am content to say that I feel the children in these instances are acting in accord with some inner direction, again they know what they need, although the need may be so complex as to be unfathomable.

The books in the library <u>are</u> stacked and displayed by librarians with great care, and the stock of library books is inventoried and expanded so that the book shelves hold as many treasures as possible. Everything about the library exudes a practical, space saving philosophy. Hence the pleasing fullness of the shelves, the books stacked row on row. In one library, though, it isn't the rows upon rows of books shelved in

this fashion that attract the attention of the girls and boys who go there. It is the display of "books with gold things," the gold medalled Caldecott award winners. It is the display of new books, where the covers face the world and tout their wares. In another library, considerable care has been taken so books stand beckoning on top of the shelves, and slanting shelves are installed where books can recline, cover upward, and invite a passing child to open it right there. I wonder, noticing these things, if the size of collection may be sacrificed somewhat in order that children may see books as they are meant to be seen.

There are special things in the libraries. Most have special low tables, chairs and/or benches where children like to gather. Two of the libraries in schools have a rocking chair where the librarian tells stories, and gives book talks. These are very special places to sit during book exchanges, and whenever vacated, they are quickly occupied by another child desirous of the experience. Children semi-recline on soft upholstered "couch-chairs" which appear to be especially coveted. In one library, a collection of different book marks is offered to children in a multi-sectioned wooden box. Wooden puzzles, ceramic animals and plants adorn the shelves and are duly admired by children. Children gather around a large white rabbit whose cage rests on top of a book shelf. It is obvious that the librarians understand how much these special things contribute to the library experience.

In the school libraries, an atmosphere is created: not just by the sunshine squares on carpeted floors, not by the shelves, their spacing or

contents, not by the special things that change their tone, not just by the children themselves as they listen to stories, or look at pictures, or talk with others, or the librarian, not just by the teacher who usually accompanies her class. It is everything, all together, and more, much as the bookmobile experience for me is a clump of sensations tied together in a memory.

It is the joyful chorus of kindergarten students who rhyme, chime and echo. The kindergarteners sit on the carpet, listening to the story the librarian reads, enraptured, every one. At the end ... "Thank you for the story," from some. Other little echoes sound "story, story," and those last to leave refrain "Thank you for the story," as they scurry off to look for treasure of their own. They find their own books, and finally they are "in line" ready to return to their classroom. I ask one little child who stands in line: "Have you read this book this book before?" He replies "I took the kitty-cat out two times." This begins the echoes and chanting in others in line: "I took it out ____ times." "I took it out ____ times." "I took _____ out ____ times." Several of the children turn to face me, wagging their books, telling me that a good book deserves a good read. Oh Oh! They've been left behind. The end of the line streaks down the hallway clutching books in hands, like a centipede struggling to stay whole.

Another group of kindergarten children, another day. The children leave with their teacher. As they leave their sing-songy voices ring out "Bye, Mrs. _____." "Bye, Mrs. _____." "Bye, Mrs. _____." They don't seem to mind that Mrs. _____, the librarian, isn't in the immediate vicinity, and that subsequently, she does not return their

adieus. Is it a chorus that rises from happiness, or a routine that makes them happy? All I sense is that pleasure is at the core. Mrs. _____ says she really enjoys this group--they also seem to enjoy her.

It is the grade ones, (and twos and threes) and their response to a story read, there in the library. It is the way their sounds and comments usually fit in with what is read, adding to the story, rather than drawing away. "Oh, oh!" they murmur in anticipation, predicting what is about to happen; but they don't break the spell by speaking of the outcome. When it finally does happen, "Oh!" "(gasp)" "Hee-hee!" They point at the book, hold their hands over their mouths and laugh. Another class silently regards a silly illustration of a pig with a ring in his nose, and only react with a chorus of giggles when the librarian actually reads the line "a pig with a ring in his nose." She is rewarded for her humorous look for a moment and then all is quiet as she continues to read.

It is talking to oneself, or a friend, or teacher, freely moving about the carpeted, buffered space. It is browsing, choosing, sharing and reclining. For some students it is a chance to move. For one grade four boy, it is like being off a leash--he releases himself, moving as he pleases in the open spaces, making motor sounds, occasionally leaping towards others. As Karl (1970:23) states:

> ... not all children read. Not all children have to. There is no innate magic in reading a book. There is delight, adventure, mind-stretching and truth seeking for those who can find it. But for some children these wonders lie elsewhere; reading will never bring them to it, so they should not waste their time on books. We don't all have to be alike.

Books play a part in the library experience, sometimes a starring role, sometimes a bit part in a crowd scene. In school and public libraries however, a particular introduction, an invitation is made to the dance between child and book, surrounded by customs and arrangements and routines. It is not the same as children's first introductions, but it is one which many children choose to accept.

And yet, there are those children who do not. Broderick (1977) says that "We will never know how many children have grown to adulthood believing the library exists only for some mythical elite to which they can never belong" (p.24).

It is near the end of the afternoon. I am writing over in a corner of the library, when I hear voices. The voices come from a space display in the library around a corner from me. "Look at this one. I've never seen this one before." "Hey!" I peek around the corner and see three very small Metis boys fingering the models and exclaiming over illustrations in the books that are there. They are so involved, excited. One boy turns, sees me, and like a member of a school of fish he signals a synchronized and hasty departure. They have that guilty look, like they shouldn't be there. One little guy offers, by way of explanation "I just took a trip to the library." They have departed with such swiftness that I am unable to explain.

How often is the invitation accepted, the dance begun, only to be interrupted by another who unwittingly crowds in?

IV. THE CROWDED DANCE FLOOR

How often have I danced, and has my experience changed, adjusted in some way to the crowd that awaits me there on the dance floor? When the space is a small one, edged by tables, and is too crowded by others in motion, I vacate it, dragging my partner behind me. When the people on the floor are my friends, the space does not make so much difference and we can dance together, nudging, laughing, occasionally lapsing into a square dance in unconventional but somehow immediately understood ways. We are not in tune with the music about us, but instead we dance in an unspoken, mutually agreed way, and revel in its own particular hilarity. There are the dance floors where people are not there to join you, but to watch you, and there my footsteps falter. Eventually, I retreat to some private place, a cloak room, perhaps, to reassure myself. Yes, I can do the steps. I practise as my partner laughs with me. I'm able to move out there again.

Max Braithwaite in Why Shoot the Teacher (1965:57-58) speaks of his first dance in a country school house at which he is the teacher.

> Then I noticed that the music was almost completely unfamiliar, and instead of the dancers embracing each other and shuffling around the floor as I was accustomed to do, they arranged themselves in groups of eight, facing each other ... I noticed a determined, red-faced matron approaching me and, before I could duck, she had me by the hand. "Come on, Teacher," she grinned. "Be my partner." ... as I looked around at their grinning faces, I knew that in some crazy way I was on trial. So I suffered myself to be led to the centre of the floor, which was by now so crowded that we could scarcely get through ... As the music gained momentum and the caller bellowed louder and the stamping of feet became deafening, I became completely and hopelessly lost.

So, for the children in school and public libraries, the dance changes, adjusts to not only the dance floor itself, but also to the other people who populate it. The other people can be dancers or watchers, can be friends or strangers, can come singly or in crowds. They are there.

One person who is almost always in a library is a librarian. Although librarians in both public and school libraries tell stories, help children find books, organize the library, and perform various functions, children are not as likely to know the public librarian in the same way that they come to know the school librarian, when there is one. It seems clear that the youngest kindergarten children have expectations of what a librarian does. Mrs. _____ the librarian, is in another room when the children enter, with their teacher following at a distance. One little girl heads to the rocker where Mrs. _____ tells stories and most of the others gather sitting on the carpet in front of her. The little girl sings out: "It's story-time boys and girls!!!! It's story-time boys and girls!!!!" She says to one of the children, "I'm being Mrs. _____." "No, you're not!" "Yes, I am." "No, you're not!" "Yes, I am." "Wait until the real one comes!"

An older child holds up a book and comments to a fellow: "Is this the book he" (shoulder moves in the direction of the librarian, Mr. _____) "told us about?"

The grade two class sits on the carpeted floor hugging various books to their tummies as the librarian introduces the book she has chosen, a book about Aztecs (Arrow to the Sun) in keeping with the class study of

Mexico. The illustrations are brilliant, and the children twist and crane their heads to get a better view if they sit along the sidelines. During the story, again, never distracting from the story itself, never breaking the spell, the children murmur in gentle chorus. "Oh, that would be very hot." "Oh, wow!" "Those are nice pictures." The librarian intones a line which ends with the phrase "the dance of life," and a wave of echoes moves through the group "the dance of life" "the dance of life ..." As the book ends, immediately children ask "Can I have that book?" "Can I have that book?" "Can I have that book?" And one child says to the librarian, "I have that book, from the book club ... you know."

Children know that the librarian will read to them, particularly in the primary years. But so do teachers. Authors of books on the teaching of reading have been unanimous in their recommendation that teachers do this. Ruth Strang (1972:242) says, "The desire to read is stimulated by seeing others reading." Margaret Meek (1982:51) adds these comments:

> Knowing what reading is all about is the most important reading lesson of all.
>
> The first thing a teacher teaches is herself, and her attitude to reading, her pleasure in it will come across to the child even before his first reading lesson.

And Ashley Montagu comments further, (1981:140) "It (reading with a child) can be among the most delightful, sharing, and enhancing of encounters."

Many authors have reflected on experiences where teachers read to them and influenced them in some way. Maya Angelou (1969:84), in I Know

Why the Caged Bird Sings, speaks of her teacher reading to her after school one day:

> She opened the first page and I heard poetry for the first time in my life. "It was the best of times and the worst of times ..." Her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words. She was nearly singing. I wanted to look at the pages. Were they the same that I had read? Or were there notes, music, lined on the pages as in a hymn book? Her sounds began cascading gently. I knew from listening to a thousand preachers that she was nearing the end of her reading, and I hadn't really heard, heard to understand, a single word ... her reading was a wonder in my ears.

In some way, the story or the words seem to "weave ... around the reader, and this awareness is a lesson that lasts much longer than the time it takes to read" (Meek, 1982:29).

Richard Rodriguez (1982:60) tells of a breakthrough experience which allowed him to see a communication in a language other than his native language, Spanish.

> Then the old nun would read from her favorite books, usually biographies of early American presidents. Playfully she ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me. I smiled just to listen to her. I sat there and sensed for the very first time some possibility of fellowship between a reader and a writer, a communication, never intimate like that I heard spoken words at home convey, but one nonetheless personal.

The young children in libraries share stories with their teachers, perhaps not in the same intensity or way as that expressed by these two authors, but they share the experience.

A kindergarten teacher stands near a little girl who is pulling a book from a shelf. She holds it up to her teachers and exclaims "Swimmy!" Her teacher nods, "Yes. Do you remember when we read that one?" The little girl nods.

The librarian is leading a discussion with the grade one children. "Fiction or fact?" she asks as she holds up one book, The Owl Who Hated the Dark. The children in the class turn to their teacher as one, excitedly repeating the title. Looking at their teacher and pointing at the book, they remind, "Remember you read that to us?" "Remember you read that to us?" There is excitement. Teacher smiles. Later, one child approaches the librarian and asks "Could you read The Owl Who Hated the Dark?"

Children show me their chosen books, extended in their hands so that I can see the covers. They offer this, "My teacher read it to us." Never do they say "Our teacher read it to us," or "My teacher read it to me." The relationship in that statement makes me wonder. It is personal, private, individual--"My teacher." Yet it is acknowledged as a group experience--"to us." Could it be, as Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1974) says, that in working with children as a teacher, you "marry them ..." (p.213) and that "rules of love-making apply to these spiritual and intellectual fusions. There must be only two, for instance" (p.215). Or is there room for more when the focus is the story, not the teacher? The children's words seem to say there is. "My teacher read it to us." At storytime in kindergarten, my children would almost invariably cuddle with teacher or a friend, their fingers stroking hair, or clothing, skin or stockings. Whatever the answer may be, the children refer time and again to stories which their teacher has read.

Frequently teachers accompany their classes into the library for book exchange.

The grade two teacher listens as a little girl tells her that the book she wants isn't on the shelf. Teacher listens, and then says, "Terri, you're a pretty good reader, another one that is pretty good is the Judy Blume ones." They look together on the shelf. The teacher explains to me later that Terri tends to read in a series.

A kindergarten boy comes to his teacher, earnestly, "I wanna read a book about ..." His teacher says, "Oh, I think it's on my desk."

A grade one girl has been looking perfunctorally at books on a shelf. Her teacher stands nearby when I ask "What kind of book are you looking for?" "The Little House." Her teacher reaches for that book and gives it to her. "Here it is, The Little House." The little girl looks but shakes her pony tail in the air, "No, I read another little house." She keeps looking, picking books from the shelf. Holding a counting book up to her teacher she asks, "Is this a good one?" Teacher says, "No, it just has numbers in it." The little girl reshelves the book. As she looks at the cover of another book she says to herself, "I wonder if this is a good one?"

One chubby cheeked kindergarten child sits at a table reading The Canadian ABC. He overhears his teacher saying to another child "pick one that has pictures you like to look at, that you're interested in." He says loudly, calling across to his teacher, "I'm interested in this one!"

The kindergarten teacher and a little boy walk by a display featuring Winnie the Pooh. They stop for an impromptu song, heads wagging in time: "Winnie the Pooh, Winnie the Pooh," they quietly sing together for a moment.

The teacher helps children at the signout desk. One girl has taken the book The Winter Cat and has begun to browse through it at the signout desk beside the teacher when she stops at the dedication page. She points at the name and says to her teacher "What does this say?" They discuss the possibilities of this unpronounceable name.

The teacher is sometimes looked to for advice, assistance, or as someone to share a discovery with, and occasionally for questions having to do with the procedures of the library. Very often the teacher volunteers to assist, offers help to the children individually. Regarding their teacher, most comments from the children are ones about the reading that goes on in the classroom, such as the stories read by the teacher, or their classroom activities which they talk about as they choose books.

The grade two teacher has organized a reading contest. One boy tells me, "I'm ahead of everyone." The little boy beside him concurs, "Yeah, he's read one hundred books!"

The children in this class have just been in the Provincial Museum, where, as one little girl reports, they saw "stuffed up animals." The librarian follows up on this theme in her story today, and now the children choose books. "This is a good one," the little grade two girl reports to me as she holds up the book. I ask, "How can you tell it's a good one?" "It's about animals and in my class, we like animal books." As she leaves she looks back at me, book open in her hands, "Oh yeah, this is a good book."

There is often a sincere, personal nature to the minute conversations between children and teacher in the library, like a time

out from the regular grind. I experience this myself, as a teacher. My grade fours and fives come, book in hand, first sharing a book, or a picture, then a story about "One time ..." I see a book, and take it over to a certain child, just because I think they'll "fit." Sometimes they will, sometimes not, but the book is almost always accepted, at least for the moment, much as a gift would be. Children also bring books to me that they feel I will enjoy, because they know my interests and my favorite authors and illustrators. Often they bring a book to me, asking me to read it to them in class sometime. "Maybe next, after we finish The Little Prince?"

The sour note for me and for the children is the time to go, the rush to finish signout, the nagging of stragglers who just have to pick "one more" book. The hurry ... but time is an issue which deserves its own talk.

One little boy in kindergarten looks at a white rabbit who resides on a bookcase in a cage. He says "He's big, he's big, he's really big!" I notice that when his teacher walks by he pretends to be eyeing the books just below the rabbit, but when she has passed, his entire focus returns to the rabbit. Sometimes the child still views the teacher as an enforcer, one who sees that you get the job done even in this more relaxed atmosphere.

Sometimes the children quizzically ponder the reactions of their teacher's routines in and about reading in the classroom. One grade four boy talks to me at length about his reading habits. At one point I ask him if he reads magazines like the one he is signing out at USSR

(Uninterrupted Silent Sustained Reading) in class. No, he reads paperbacks for USSR. He adds that it took him a long time to read Danny Dunn Space Traveller in his USSR periods. When he finished, he got a "task card." Then it only took him one day to read the next book and still(!), he got a "task card."

Mostly, the children in school libraries seem to understand that the books are the books of their choice. You don't have to take the ones your librarian likes, or the ones your teacher may recommend. You can take your own. You have a choice.

As young children choose books in the public library setting, their parents are almost invariably there or close at hand. In many cases they crowd the dance floor. In fact, they may take it over.

A little boy, some five years in age, enthusiastically chooses three little books off a low rack in the public library. As he looks at the books on the shelf, a smile comes to his lips, he makes little appreciative noises to himself. He runs over to his mother to show her the books. He offers her the three. After a first glance she comments, "You can't read those. They're too hard." She turns the books over one by one, adamantly stating for each: "That's too hard. That's too hard. That's too hard. Here ... let me ... help you find some. Where did you find these?" He points to the shelf where he picked them up. Returning them to that shelf, she turns, taking his hand and heading to the shelf where she had been browsing. "Here, let me help you." Mom picks books from top shelves, while her son looks disconsolately at the bottom shelf. He picks up one or two of them and offers them to his mother hopefully,

but she doesn't think they are right for him. Instead she chooses books, holding them high, with her small son looking up at their covers as she looks inside. Finally she takes his hand and they head for the check out desk. Waiting in line he looks up at the books and sees one particular one on top. He pulls his hand away from hers and points at this book. He begins to whine. "I don't like that kind of book." Mom ignores. He begins to cry. "I don't like that kind of book and I don't want to get it." No reply. "Mommy, please. Don't read that one tonight at bedtime because I don't want it. Read another one at bedtime tonight, please." Mom nods that she will.

In the same library, at the same time, a dad moves about the children's section with a plastic bag in one hand. Quietly the man, his daughter and younger son browse. Once in a while the daughter goes over to a table and reads a book she has chosen. She always moves back to watch father who is choosing books and putting them in the bag he carries. Once the daughter brings a book to her Dad and holds it up to him. He says, "You've got enough." The daughter says, offering another choice, "What about this one?" "No, you don't need that one." The father continues choosing books, now presumably for the younger son. Later the daughter, who is now holding the bag, fishes out a book and asks "Is this mine? Which are mine? Which are mine?" No reply. Later the little girl says "Put this one in the bag, Daddy." He does so.

Two mothers and their three children are browsing in the children's section one day after school. When I arrive, one of the children, an eight-year-old boy comes to his mom with a selected book and hands it to

her (for approval?). She says "You can't read that book." "Well, I can read some of it." "You can't read this," she says, flipping the pages, as if demonstrating that he can't. Another child, the daughter of the other mom says "I can." The boy's mother says to her "What grade are you in? (Inaudible reply.) Mom considers this and comments "Oh, same as _____ (her son). How old are you?" she asks the girl. (Inaudible reply.) The son looks as his mother continues to examine the book. "I can read some of it." "You can't read this." Final. The mothers go off in search of other books with the downcast son following some distance behind. His mother shows him suitable books from time to time.

Another mother and son have been browsing separately in the children's section. They meet at one point. Mom asks, gesturing at the boy's books, "What you got there?" The son, tightly clutching the books to his chest, mumbles, "I got a few books of my own." He continues to hold the books in this manner while she shows him a book she has found. She flips to various pages as she talks to him. "This is what we want. You can take out this book. Those are all the things you wanted to know about. See?" "Okay."

In these times I can see the nature of the dance changing. It is as if there is a "caller" there, directing the dance, but the child, like Max Braithwaite, in Why Shoot the Teacher, doesn't know the significance of the calls. A friend of mine talks to me about how her children begin to understand the calls and make moves to circumvent the insistence of the caller. My friend admits that she looks for books that will be "good" for her children, eight and ten. She wants them to gain from what they read, and acknowledges her distinct tastes in books. Now, she says,

her children "get around her" when they go to the library. She says that both children go to the shelves, hunt for a few moments, and then bring a book to her saying "Here's a book you'd like." Then, she says, they go and choose what they want while she is kept busy. I have no way of knowing if this happens often except ...

After school one day, a mom offers a book to her son: "Would you like this one?" "ALL-RIGHT!" he exclaims over-enthusiastically. Children in the immediate vicinity look oddly at him after this exclamation. The same boy later comes to his mother. "Here's a book about Mother's Day. It's a good one." He leaves her with it.

Other parents crowd less closely on the dance floor, offering support and an opportunity to share.

A small girl, five years old, with blonde hair tied back with little animal barrettes giggles as she looks at the cover of a book she holds in her hands. She is seated by herself at one of the low tables in the library this Saturday morning. The book is new, so as she opens the book she makes a fist and runs it over the pages in an attempt to make it behave like a book should. Her mother comes in after she has examined several pages in the beginning of the book. "How's it going?" mom asks quietly. Her daughter looks up, stands up, beckoning her mother to sit beside her. "Wanna take this one?" the daughter asks. "Here, I'll show you." She begins to motion to the last page she looked at, but reconsiders. "I'll start all over." She turns back to the cover. Mother, after looking says, "Sure, it looks like a good one." The little girl rises and moves to a nearby shelf. She picks up another book.

"Mom, I looked at this one. It's a crazy one. I picked it out." Mom peers from the table where she has remained sitting, "There's lots of things in there ... That's one of the baby books, isn't it?" The daughter, hearing this, immediately returns the book to the shelf. "Mommy, you look for some." In the meantime, the little girl picks one from the shelf, and brings it back to her mom. "That book Okay?" she asks. "Yeah." They look through it together. The little girl says "I like this one, we'll start right here." Mom flips through, "Oh, we got this one once before." The daughter closes it, looking once more at the cover. "Oh, yeah, we did." She returns it to the shelf. A little later mom and daughter search the shelves together. Mother holds a book in her hand and says "See this one here." They look together. The daughter picks it up hesitantly — "Looks like a long book." Tentatively, she leafs through. Giggles. "Looks like an Easter bunny in it." Mom turns a page. The little girl laughs. "You read it," she says to mom. Mother reads and her small daughter laughs again.

A little later that morning, an eight-year-old girl takes her books, which she has selected on her own, to her mom who is in the adult section. As they return, I hear her mother speaking, "... not enough to keep you going." "Can you help me?" the daughter asks, as they walk by some low shelves. Mom holds out one book. The daughter quickly comments "I read that book before. I saw that book before." Mom offers another, "Oh, here's a good one." "Does it have colors?" The daughter looks at the book which is still in her mother's hands and then, after looking at it herself, returns it to the shelf. Mom announces, "I found a good one

for you." The daughter takes it to a low table and opens it. "It's a good one ... and I only looked at the front page!" As they leave the children's section the little girl hugs her books to her chest with both arms and rests her chin on the largest one.

Although the children in these cases still tend to look to mom for approval of selections, there is an acknowledged give and take in the relationship. One feels that parent and child understand that each person has different preferences, even though what one says may influence the other.

As in the school setting, time is a constraint. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that one of the most relaxed encounters I witness in the public library takes place between a grandfather and his small grandson one Saturday morning. (But, as I've said before, time deserves it's own special emphasis. Look for grandpa and grandson in the discussion to come, in the chapter entitled "The Time it Takes.")

Parents often seem to take book selection quite seriously. An expectant mother and her little two-year-old daughter enter the children's section. The mother comes to me and says: "Is this the toddler's section? I haven't been to this library before." She pulls a file folder from under her arm, and spreads it open on top of a bookshelf. The file folder contains numerous newspaper clippings and mimeographed sheets. She adds "I have some specific books I'm looking for." She proceeds to do so. The little daughter picks up a large picture book and carries it about exclaiming in uncomprehensible phrases.

Mom encourages her exploration by occasional comments and tacit unspoken approval.

Looking at earlier discussion of the distinctions made between "Easy" and "hard" books in the school library it is interesting to see another distinction being made, this time by a parent. A mom says to her daughter, "What do you want to learn about? Those aren't learning books; they're reading books. You want me to help you?"

Seeing parents and children in the library, sensing what these experiences might be like for the children, I am left with all the statements made in "the literature" on the subject of children's chosen books, and self-selection. They do not settle easily with what I have seen, although they ring of truth.

> Just as I believe we must learn not to ask people to justify their feelings, so have I come to believe that people--a word that includes children--have a right to like books without our approval (Broderick, 1977:25).

Meek et al, (1977:11), in their discussion of children's literature, The Cool Web:

> ... although it is impossible to judge books for children by what are called 'adult standards' and regard them as part of literature, the young reader carries a different world in his head, no less complex than an adult's but differently organized. He needs his stories in a different way, his experiences of reading must be different. When discussing stories for children, to lose sight of the reader is too dangerous to contemplate."

Barton (1977:357) makes the following comments:

> Nevertheless research continues to show that there is no appreciable narrowing of the gap between what the group of concerned adults see as desirable and what the children choose and enjoy ... There would seem to be a crucial mismatch between the adult's expectation of the impact of books upon the child and the child's actual response.

Karl (1970:24) states what she sees as ideal:

> Yet for all of them, reading, whenever and however they come to it, should never be a chore. It should be a chosen activity. And the books that will give them what they want should be available. ... And it is their interests, and at the same time their deep needs--their almost unrecognized and unknown but strongly felt searchings--that must be met.

I try to think of times when the dance floor seems most hospitable, most memorable in experience. Strangely, I cannot sense the crowd at all on these occasions, so rhythmic is the movement, so engaged am I with my partner, the music surrounds us. The feeling, one of ease. "It is as I imagine waltzing on ice might be. A great delicious sweep in one direction, taking you your full strength, and then, with no trouble at all, an equally delicious sweep in the opposite direction" (Maxwell, 1974:14). I can't say for sure, but I think the space is there. The crowd may be there too, but its role is secondary.

Having said this, how can children be at ease in a crowded school library, surrounded by fellows who are mobilized in the same search at the same time?

It appears to be different. They are not there to watch, so footsteps do not falter. It is more like the folk-dance of many peoples where the dancers come together, clapping hands, clasping hands in a circle, or facing each other for a time.

In the school library, children, mostly in pairs, search the shelves for books. They talk about the books, things they are doing, things they wish. Snatches of the conversation reach my spying ears.

Boy and girl are signing out books at the table. The boy says, "You should read that one I'm reading in class. It has twenty-one chapters." "Which one?" the girl asks. "The one I'm always reading." She says "I'm reading Bunnicula--you know, like Dracula, only a bunny." They both laugh with gusto, "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

One grade four student talks to a friend: "But well, they're easy, but I really like them!"

Two students look at a book, E.T. (the Extra-Terrestrial) among mingled talk of the movie and book. "I want to see it again," says one. The movie. "Can I take it after you, please?" asks the other. The book.

Two grade four girls examine a book on horses and discuss the difference between a "pony" and a "horse." They search for proof for their arguments in the illustrations of the book, and through this means they come to an accord.

Two boys lie on their stomachs on the carpet looking at their collective books. "This one's weird, look at this!" "Excellent! Storm troopers and Darth Vader! Let me see this book!" Two other boys join them with their airplane and space books and suddenly they are engaged in a categorizing activity--can space ships be considered airplanes?

Two children look at Stuart Little. "Did you read Charlotte's Web?" The other nods slightly, picks up the book and examines the cover closely. Together they read an excerpt that appears on the cover and study the illustration. (E.B. White is the author of both.)

Two grade two boys browse through picture books at a table. "I like that." "Look at that." They both point. "Riddles and games. Riddles! Riddles!" "I like this one. It's signed out." "I'm taking this

airplane one." They point to another illustration. "Oh, gross." "Yeah." "This, look at this ... whooa!" "Lookit this!" (the picture) "He ..." (the illustrator) "... probably had to sit real steady." "Real, real, real." "Wierd." "I wanna take this." They look at a tiny illustration. They make sound effects, fingers still pointing. "I like this. Look how many people can sit in here." "Hey, wait, don't turn ..." The one little fellow hurries over to get a pencil.

A group of grade one boys gathers around a magazine with a picture of Wayne Gretzky. "Wayne Gretzky!" "99!" they exclaim excitedly, all at one. It's play-off hockey time.

As the kindergarten children line up to leave the library, one child says, "I like this book." Immediately the child-chant and chugging of the book "train" leads off to a chorus of "I like this book," "I like this book," "I like this book," all the way down the hall.

"I had this before ... it's a good one. It's a good one. It's a good one," says the little curly-haired boy to the little girl as they browse on the rack of books. Together they reach high on tippy-toe.

A girl sits at a table beside a little fellow, her classmate. She says, pointing to a very tiny, almost inconspicuous creature afloat in a wonderfully creative double page portrayal of whales, porpoises, sea birds, "Hey Paul! Look at that! Look at that!" Smiles are exchanged.

The same kind of incidents take place with siblings in the public library setting.

One child finds a paperback, <u>The Knight Rider</u>, and holds it up to his friend. The friend is impressed, "Oh, all right! The Knight Rider!"

A very small sister echoes "Knight Rider!" The boys say "Hot cars!" "Lookit this!" The three peer over the book together.

A brother and sister duo look at paperbacks, one of which is E.T. The brother, who is older, says, "I didn't take them. I hate them." The little sister, (much appalled!) looks directly at him, hands on hips, and in a shocked tone of voice says, "Brian, don't say you hate E.T.!" The brother says, "I didn't say E.T. I hate them books."

An older sister listens to a question from her younger brother about a book he has chosen. She advises, "It's boring after you read it for a while ... (she pauses, looking at his face) ... but it's good."

The presence of other children does not seem threatening. Children can enjoy the experience of choosing together, discussing their likes and dislikes, and appear to have an appreciation that their choices may, indeed, be different than other children's. Even the older sister in the example above (you know the reputation that older sisters have!) modifies her response to her little brother, showing some empathy for his feelings and respect for his choice.

As I watch the children and their responses to other children's choices I feel that it is the model I would choose to follow in my contact with children about me.

True, at first I find it difficult to shed "teacher" and wear the "researcher" cloak. Very soon I am made painfully aware of the error of my ways. On my second (only second!) visit to a grade four class, I am mortified. I walk by the signout desk as the student-library helper asks the girl who is checking out Wind in the Willows, "Why did you take that

one out?" The student-"librarian" looks pointedly at me. Getting no reply, she continues "What's special about it?" The girl shrugs, looks at the cover. Again the student-"librarian" looks my way, as if to say, "Well, I tried to help you." It is easy for me to see that I am "trying too hard to be really real" in the way expressed in my introductory chapter. Instead I vow to let things be, to be satisfied with being there, and, if nothing else, listening with my eyes and ears, taking sketches, sketches like those Virginia Woolf (1974:232) puts in her diary. I wish that these sketches "might be islands of light--islands in the stream that I am trying to convey; life itself going on." So, I relax and tune in.

Where I become merely available for discussion, showing interest in the way that other children show interest, forsaking my questions, I am amazed at the eagerness with which children share their chosen books with me.

One little grade one girl calls across to me, as I talk with another child, "Mrs. Thomas ... come here, see? Lots of us have books to show you!" She shows me a double page colored illustration of balloons against a blue, blue sky and looks for my reaction. She has been "keeping" the page for me with her finger.

A curly-haired little girl leans on my shoulder as I sit at a low table. "Look!" She holds the cover of a book to me, The Little Rabbit's Loose Tooth. "That's the book I need." She quickly draws my attention to her wiggly teeth, and reports on others that have wiggled themselves free and into the hands of the tooth fairy.

So much sharing takes place, voluntarily, on the part of the children when I stand back, quietly listening. In the public library, I stand back to even a greater degree, and yet I am further surprised by the companiable sharing that can take place in this situation.

I sit at a low table on a stool. There is an eight-year-old girl across from me at the table and she looks up as I sit down. She continues reading her book. Soon the little toddler (whose mother is searching for books on her lists from the file folder) comes by still grasping a picture book in her hands. Awkwardly, she balances it in front of her, looking about so intently that she is wobbling as she walks. As she comes to my side, she slides up on the low stool close beside me, as naturally as can be. She looks at me, and the little girl across the table. We are reading, occasionally turning the pages, so the toddler does the same in her upside-down picture book. She looks completely satisfied with this comfortable silent page turning for several minutes.

A preschooler walks to the children's section from the adult section where her mother is browsing. She watches me for a moment then comes over beside me and lifts her T-shirt sleeve off her shoulder. She points with her finger and says "See this hole? I had a needle there."

A little girl, eight years old, looks curiously at me as I look at a book at the small low table. She edges around me for a moment, considering. Even though the table is the only one occupied and is, more than the others, covered with books, she comes and sits companiably beside me. She browses through her books, page by page, often mouthing

the words, whispering to herself. There are four books she brings to the table, but she takes a long time to look through them.

I can only recommend the sensation of this kind of sharing. In time I come to understand it, to savor it.

V. THE TIME IT TAKES

The experience of choosing and reading books exists not only in a particular space, but also in a moment in time. This time is more than minutes steadily ticking away the regular minutes and hours of clock life, it is a variable dimension. Time from a young perspective is more related to the tasks and pleasure lived during a day, determined by present occupation. Fun and pleasurable moments can be short in duration, but long in memory.

Library card in mitten, smooth manilla with worn cloth-like edges, I walked crunch, crunch, crunch through the snow to the bookmobile on bright, crisp, freezing-cold-puffs-of-smoke-from-your-mouth Saturdays. The warm bookmobile and its familiar routine invited me in to stay as long as I would, look all I liked to and when I was ready I let the old gray lady in a sweater look at my card and stamp the books. The books I like are little ones, pretty pictured ones, ones where animals are like people, sometimes like funny people. Or ones that look the same as other books outside, but are different inside. The inside is the important thing, I know, but I like the way books look, especially the small ones. I always take as many books as I am allowed, sometimes I take the same book over and over and over ... Sometimes, I don't like to take those ones back. Those ones I <u>really</u> like, mommy knows. She reads them until I read myself, but still long to hear her say the words. I like the pictures so much, I want them to be mine. Or, I want them to be real. After I go to bed sometimes, I think that's when, mommy sits at the kitchen table and traces the pictures of my favorite books for me on

blank looseleaf paper, and writes the words underneath. (They go together.) Mommy puts them in a binder so I can read them over and over whenever I want. I wonder now, looking at those pages, painstakingly traced and shaded, pages upon pages of the gift, is it the gift of time?

As adults we can understand the need for time, the dimensions it can take on at different times, and yet our inner time has changed under the duress of scheduling and in an attempt to save time, to hold the minutes in abeyance, "We have become so addicted to saving time that we forget to differentiate between the things we like to do ... and the things we hate to do ... We efficiently shorten them all" (Goodman, 1979:51).

The two little ones scamper into the downtown library to the chagrin and urgent "shhhh's" of their mother. I am struck by her admonition as she scuttles them over to the picture book section of the library: "Hurry now, we don't have time to <u>choose</u> books today." In this statement mom really acknowledges the fact that it does take time to choose books and that it is preferable to make one's own choice, but that somehow this process can be abbreviated. Choice implies an element of time and can be pleasant and leisurely, or hectic hard work, as Goodman (1979:49) says, "fun can be fun. If you don't work too hard at it."

This is the force of thought in <u>hurry up Bonnie</u> (Alderson, 1977), a children's book. Bonnie wants to go to the corner store with mom to get a newspaper.

> "If you come quickly," her mother sighed. Bonnie McSmithers said, "I will try." (p.8).
>
> and then her mother was way ahead and calling, calling:
> "Hurry up, Bonnie! Come on, let's go!
> "My daughter, the snail--you're much too slow." (p.10).

> So Bonnie ran quickly, quickly to catch up, and she walked right next to her mother until she heard a siren going eeeeeeee and there was a fire truck coming and (p.16).

> Bonnie could see it coming closer and closer
> and whoosh past her
> and going further and further away.
> But then ... her mother was way, way ahead again and calling:
> "Bonnie, the snail, you'd better run!
> "Quickly now, or you can't come!" (p.19).

But on the way back from the corner store, Bonnie convinces her mother that they can stop at the park. Mom reads her paper as Bonnie plays. She discovers two snails, and decides to watch them "travel all around the world."

> The snails were going as fast as they could, but Bonnie got tired of waiting. "It's a long way around the world," she said. "We don't have to go the whole way today." (p.28).

The story ends joyously, mother putting down her paper and joining Bonnie in some delightful play on the big playground slide.

The admonition of Meek (1982:95) rings in our ears:

> Children also need time to choose what they want to look at or read with an adult.
>
> Quite often parents cut this choosing short so as to get down to the business of reading aloud, even when they know that part of a reader's satisfaction is the anticipation that comes in browsing.

We are back in the library.

The grade one teacher announces that the children don't have long to choose books today, so the children scurry off in a pretended frenzy, in all directions, giggling.

Mom says to son, "Okay, let's go." "Okay. I'll get just one more book." As they stand at checkout desk, mom sighs, "That was a rush."

Another mother herds her protesting daughters to the checkout: "Hurry, swimming's in ten minutes, it's twenty to ____."

As a mother and a five-year-old daughter walk into the children's section, the little girl motions toward the table where she wants to sit. "We don't have time to sit down. Hurry up! Choose your books." The little girl chooses books, hands them to her mother who checks them over. She hands one more to mom, who has held them so far. Mom returns it to a shelf, saying, "No, you can only take _____." "No, I want this," the little girl reaches for the last book which has been returned to the top shelf, just about out of her reach. The little girl takes it in her hand, plops it on the others, removes one of the books her mother has been holding, returning it, instead, to the shelf. They are gone as if they are being timed by stop watch for their performance, rushing to the signout desk where mom taps her fingernails impatiently on the books until a librarian appears. The little girl amuses herself by lowering her head and playing under the turnstile at the exit.

One of the characters in Heide's (1976:16) When the Sad One Comes to Stay, an old woman who befriends a little girl, comments on how long ago something happened, on time in general:

> Maisie stops rocking, she stops knitting, she frowns. "A bit of time, a hunk of time," she says after a while. "But it go down fast, it go down fast lessen you look at it go. My grandy told me, if you start watchin' time then it start watchin' you."

You start watchin' time then it start watchin' you. But children, as a rule, don't watch time this way. Perhaps in songwriter James Taylor's words, they have found some of "the secret of life ... enjoying the passage of time."

Consider the grandfather and his little grandson I hinted at before. Grandson searches the shelves finding one book at a time, bringing it over to his grandfather who sits patiently, more than patiently, enjoying the scene at one of the little tables in the children's section. Quietly, they come together at that table, commenting, questioning, pondering the pages as they are gently turned. At the end of each book, grandpa asks: "Do you want this one?" He accepts the reply, stacking the books in a "keeper" pile in front of him. The others, he sets aside in much the same way as he would release the little fish out on a rowboat on a sun-glimmering lake. In this way, they collect four. This appears to be a mutually agreeable number, "the magic number," and they leave with their catch. The pattern appears to be a comfortable, well-known one for these two.

Other children seem well at ease, on their own, on their own time, browsing in the library.

A daintily dressed three-year-old hums and chants about the library, her head crooked at various angles to look at books which she has not removed from shelves, or even touched. Her hands and fingers dance in the air as she alternately chants or sings, sometimes her arms wave over her head as she twists and turns in a captivating dance ...

"More, more, more books,
More, more, more, more, more books,
Is no more books."

Nearby, a little girl sits at a table with her collection of books. Leisurely she looks through each book. She rises, taking her books,

meeting her mother who sits near the checkout, and well satisfied, they both leave.

A chubby little grade one boy browses enthusiastically, talking to himself in the school library. He finds Where the Wild Things Are on a shelf. "Oh, right on! All right!" He knocks the book on his head twice, goes to the checkout table, but turns around and puts the book back on the shelf. He continues browsing. He tips the books and looks at their covers. "Oh, gross. Ha Ha!" "Gretzky, 99, What a guy!" "Clifford ... Clifford ... Clifford." "Oh dee, oh dee, oh dee." "Charlie Brown, Charlie Brown, Charlie Brown. Oh, Yeah!"

Children (adults too, shall we say people?) get caught up in the browsing available in school and public libraries.

A grade two girl wanders about the library as if in a spell until the librarian gently mentions that it is time to go. (Lunchtime.) she is startled, waking, looking around and scurrying off. She's been so intent, she has scarcely seen the world around her. I can tell just by the look on her face.

When we lose sight of surrounding features of life, savoring the moment like this, time does stand still for a moment, and we are able to hold it in our memories, through all time.

Years go by.
In time they pass.
The seconds
Leaping, surging, tumbling
Onward in the current
Of seconds rushing to form minutes
And minutes jostling into hours.

Years go by
And leave us
Wondering why
They went so fast ...
In answer to our queries,
Memories return
The hours from the past.

VI. THE PLEASURES OF THE DANCE

Reading Revisited

So it is that over time we hold memories: like little children holding books, we hug memories close to our chests, close to our hearts. In recalling a memory one is not just recalling events, but remembering what was. By way of conversation and literature this holistic remembering becomes obvious.

Our memories of books and reading are also memories of a time and place, more than a story or a particular facet of the book itself. Heide (1976:32-34) describes the fictional meeting of a teenager with her own childhood book:

> I take down a book from my shelves ... It is a Christmas time long ago, it must be when I was still with my father. I leaf through the book. The leaves are turned down, there are finger marks and jam marks on its pages, and there are drawings on some of them, childish scrawls that I recognize are mine. This is a book from the old days.
>
> I read through it, not reading it but looking for clues, looking for bits and pieces of the time with my father, and I turn a page to find an old faded snapshot.
>
> ... I stare at the snapshot, and the face of the little girl that was me smiles at me. Maybe she tries to make a friend of me. I try to smile back.

The memory of the time is strong, with the book playing a part of minor significance, a supporting role. Perhaps through memories connected to books once read we do try to "make a friend" of ourselves, understanding what we are and have been. The fact that we remember the book at all seems to tell us that there was something in it for us at the time, and perhaps even now? Can a remembered book come to stand with the

feelings, dreams and thoughts that we had while reading in a particular time and space?

The music of the time comes to us again as we look at a faded snapshot, reminding us of a long ago dance with a beloved partner, and ghostly music sounds in our ears for an instant, even now. Ebenezer Scrooge, in Dicken's A Christmas Carol (1950:39-40) looks back at not a photo, but himself:

> The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an ax stuck in his belt ...
>
> "Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, Yes. I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here, all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that ...
>
> To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends ...
>
> Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.
>
> "I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late now."

"Some of us have childhoods we enjoy; others have childhoods we must recover from," says Goodman (1979:161). It seems so for Ebenezer whose great joy in the memory of a time and story turns to the sadness of a wish that comes too late (or does it????) Within and beyond a legacy of childhood pain or illness, books can become a source of childhood "treasure." Charles Dickens himself, as described by his biographer,

Lincoln (1962:6) finds books left by a previous tenant, which become for him a treasure.

> That miraculous windfall was a wonder that never wore thin; his books, his secret world, his power ... After the bad kidney gave him a bout of pain, he would lie convalescent and happy on the bed under the sloping eaves, holding the book in the golden shaft of afternoon light that made ripples on the page and on the wall behind him. And through the window, less real than the world of his story, he would head the children in the churchyard over the way, playing at hide-and-seek behind the tombstones.

When a person revisits reading there is not always joy in the encounter, but there is absorption. The way that we remember our childhood books and reading tells us, that in that time there was also an involvement that held the moment in time. In fact, Graham Greene (1960) goes so far as to state that "it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives."

Although it often appears that books can have deep significance in childhood, I am less able to understand what it is about a book that wields this power. A book can be comfort, escape, recreation, story illustration and/or a simple object. In fact, like pictures, books "seem forever to be consigned to the limbo of the unreal" (Bower, 1977:63). Part representation, part surrogate, we remember them only within a particular context of time and space.

Richard Rodriguez (1982:62-63) recounts his experience as a self-dubbed "scholarship boy," a Mexican American who finds in books and education much sorrow as they wedge between boy and family for all time. Who can say that the books themselves, as separate entities, have this deep influence on Rodriguez' life? Did they, do they play a part, a

role? For Rodriguez, memories of reading, pleasures of the dance are described as places, times of day, a vague feeling of comfort.

> ... In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely good company of books. Early on weekday mornings I'd read in my bed. I'd feel a mysterious comfort then, reading in the dawn quiet--the blue-gray silence interrupted by the occasional churning of the refrigerator motor a few rooms away or the more distant sounds of a city bus beginning its run.
>
> A warm summer evening was my favorite reading time. Neighbors would leave for vacation and I would water their lawns. I would sit through the twilight on the front porches or in backyards, reading to the cool, whirling sounds of the sprinklers.

It is interesting, that in these childhood recollections, Rodriguez, and others, do not once speak of the story, ideas or information in the books read. Yet Hunsberger (1982), in her investigation of adult reading says "It is the story, the ideas, the information, in short, the human contact which engrosses us." How is it that our memories of childhood reading do not tell us this is true? Could it be that as children we integrate all that can be important within the experience? Could it be that we continue to integrate these features, as adults, but rely on them less? Bower, in his study The Perceptual World of the Child (1977:83) says that a child "allows the evidence of his senses to dominate his judgement."

> In time, ... we rely less and less on what we can see to explain what we can see. We explain our world in terms of unseeable, imperceptible events and forces. And yet our perceptual world, the source of all we know, still conditions and shapes the way we know, even when we are reasoning in terms of the unseen and the imperceptible ... The more we grow away from the perceptual world, the more we are compelled to return to ... certainties of perception.

If we trust the certainty of our memories, the host of details they contain, we cannot say that we don't remember the stories, the information of all books we read as children because of some ineptness of memory. We simply remember what is important in the experience: the pleasures, the absorption of the dance shines through in a myriad of impressions. Sometimes, if strong, those "childish impressions of light and colour come crowding back into my mind and with them the expectant, which then palpitated within me, lives for a ghostly moment" (James, 1974:195). I for one cannot believe that my memories are false or fabricated in nature.

And so in childhood, it appears the pleasures of the dance are individual and personal. The music plays for each a different tune. Our steps are personal variations on even formal structured dances. And our joys, our pleasures take on different dimensions and particular, even peculiar facets ...

Book-Pleasures

Long before children learn established and acceptable "book behaviors" they seem to take some pleasure in their young associations with books as objects. Toylike in the beginning, books are subject to exploration, to different handling and treatment in the hands of young children. At times this interest which children have in books as actual objects baffles adults:

> Like many parents, I have been amused by the way my mixed infants, once in the library, have so often gone straight for those books they already possess at home. Usually I have dissuaded them, not without protest, but once when I was not looking, a book was taken out which was already an established

> favorite on our own book-shelves. Once at home, far from any mistake being recognized, both copies were immediately compared with great interest--page by page, and then taken up to bed together, so that the characters from one page could talk to their identical counterparts in the other book. In terms of interest, therefore, this particular choice was a great success (Tucker, cited by Barton, 1977:357).

Fern, a girl in grade two, comes to me holding identical books, one in each hand. Delight is written all over her. "Look! Look!" She holds the books side by side, indicating that, yes, they are exactly the same! She walks over to a shelf and puts the twins side by side, and begins to examine them, in turn, page by page. (How often do you find two of the same book in a library?) Fern, after confirming that the two are indeed the same, looks at me and says, "Which one should I take?" I know she doesn't really expect an answer, as a half-smile plays across her lips. Answer? She takes neither!

Later, Fern takes her books to the checkout desk. I hear her telling the librarian about her books. She stacks them to leave and suddenly exclaims "Here, look! I've got one little, one middle-sized and one large!" She shows me and adds, "I took them by size!" Again she shows the librarian, and then heads to find her teacher too.

One grade four student comments with some excitement to another: "Me and you took out the same ones!" They compare together and look quite surprised, wide-eyed looks are exchanged and then there is laughter.

It appears that books themselves capture the attention and interest of children in different ways. Rodriguez (1982:63) remembers that "Carrying a volume back to the library, I would be pleased by it's

weight. I'd run my fingers along the edge of the pages and marvel at the breadth of my achievement."

A kindergarten boy has a thin, pliable, shiny covered paperback. He holds it by the spine, so it flops over to the side. Gently he flips over the drooping pages with his hand. Later he holds his hand flat on the book and pats it gently. A tactile experience?

A grade four boy holds a thick, hard covered book his hand. The spine facedown, the boy's thumb flips over and through the pages of the thick book rapidly. "Speedreading," he says simply.

One kindergartener chooses a book. He stands, holding it, and suddenly is taken with examining different ways to turn pages. At one point he holds the book sideways and "walks" his fingers all around it.

Like other objects, books can be possessions, and there is a pleasure in possessing a book. "Around my room, growing stacks of paperback books reenforce my assurance" (Rodriguez, 1982:63). "Owning books is a special kind of possessing, a hoarding that all readers share" (Meek, 1982:88).

A little boy is at the checkout desk with his sister and mother, watching as the books are signed out and rested on the counter in front of them. He can only just see the counter-top. "Where are <u>my</u> books? Where are <u>my</u> books?" His mom stacks his books for him. She attempts to quiet his insistence. "Those all mine ...Mommy, I want to read them in the car," he says as they leave.

At the "Book Fair" at a school library, children examine the array of paperbacks displayed and write orders for those they wish to buy. They will take home the order form so that parents may approve it. One

grade four girl finishes her second page of orders just as I pass by. I say, "You've ordered a lot!!!" Eagerly, she goes in search of yet another order form, and hurries to write in more orders before lunchtime. "I love books," she says as she rushes off.

Children are apt to mention any time when they see a book in the library that they actually own at home. "I have that one at home, and let me see. That one ... I don't have at home." "I have that book." Even very young children know there is a difference between temporary ownership, borrowing, and really having the book.

Two girls kneel by a book shelf, browsing together. "I have this book." "You don't have this book, you have it in the library."

But there are other more symbolic ways of "owning" a book.

A grade two girl sits on the floor with the books she has signed out. She has a bookmark in one hand which she selected from a big wooden box in the library. She marks a page. "I'm going to keep this page because it's a very good page." She looks around, seeing me says, "Wow, see this, look, see this! I love this. I was right to pick this big book! Will you read this page for me?" I do so. She remarks the page with her bookmark as I finish reading.

Children collect bottle caps, popsicle sticks, rocks, buttons, baseball cards, stickers and other possessions. Is it surprising that the collecting of books should appeal to them as well? Is there not an element of collecting, owning, in the desire to have read all the members of a series of books? In a sense this mental listing is satisfying; some

of the satisfaction comes from not only the collecting, but the completeness of the collection.

> ... the young man ... came into the library one evening. In black leather jacket and motorcycle boots he swaggered over to the shelves and picked up The Borrowers Aloft, defiantly pulled a chair into the middle of the floor, and sat there tensely, with one eye on me and the other on the book. 'He's trying to bait me,' I said to myself and offered to help him find something more suitable.
>
> To my surprise, he muttered, 'I read the others when I was a kid. I didn't know there was another.' We declared a truce and he read for a while. Then he called in a loud whisper, 'Hey, librarian, check this book out for me. I'm embarrassed.'
>
> Presently, he got to his feet, marched stiffly to the circulation desk, and checked out the book himself (Bacon, 1977:133).

A grade four boy remarks, "I used to read Ranger Rick but I've already read all of them, so now I read Owl."

In the public library one Saturday morning, an eight-year-old boy eagerly and ambitiously compiles a huge stack of a series, "MacDonald Starters." He makes a move down to the check-out desk, but, changes his mind, turns around and rushes back for yet others! He flips through the books, peering down into the cracks between them for a look at the covers, as his personal collection awaits him on the floor. Soon he is on his knees, still checking the alternatives on the shelf. He chooses another two. He lifts the collection off the floor, as one stack, but they slip out of his grasp. Again he sits on the floor to get them in order. Hefting them in his hand, he stacks the books in two piles, and with considerable dexterity, hoists one pile under each arm, and heads out to the circulation desk. All those books almost slide out of his control as he negotiates the stairs!

So often I, like this little boy, collect and collect at the library, tasting and sampling. My husband looks up from his paper as I come to the door from the library, stack of books in hand. I have taken too long, and too many books. It's not reasonable, but he understands me. I am reminded of a mother who speaks to her daughter, after school in the library one day. "It will take you long enough to read these three. You can't take out every book you want each time!" Another mother, at the public library says, as her daughter chooses a third book, "It will take two weeks for you to read those two!"

There is pleasure to be gained in different ways for some, and I harken to the words of Barton (1977:358).

> So what at first appeared to be a meaningless choice to the adult, turned out to be important and full of meaning to the children. It makes me wonder how often we may thwart important early approaches such as these by focusing too narrowly on the intrinsic nature of the book, thus ignoring significant extrinsic features.

Pleasures, daily pleasures of living, need not be earth-shaking or grandiose to be there and to be appreciated.

Illustrations

Nobody involved with children's books disputes the importance of illustrations in chidren's literature.

> ... illustrations draw children into the picture so that they, in a sense, walk around inside it. This is very important for understanding a story, and getting the feel of the book.
>
> ... the best books for children ... are those that reflect the author's and illustrator's pleasure in making them as well as they can (Meek, 1982:48-50).
>
> True events do not necessarily make true stories. Art demands more than faithfulness to real details (Karl, 1970:29).

Children, certainly, make clear their concern with and pleasure in looking at the pictures, the illustrations.

I hear one grade four boy state, "No pictures, forget it!"

"Oh!" says one grade four boy, looking admiringly at the cover illustration of A Wrinkle in Time. He opens the book, and immediately dismisses it. "It's too printy." A succinctly stated criticism, is it not?

One boy in grade two talks to his teacher at the checkout desk. "I like this library book, because it's got more better pictures." He also shows the librarian. "Cause it's got more colorful pictures."

At the signout table, one boy who is approaching, book in hand, reads the title out loud. "Arms of Our Fighting Men." A boy at the table looks at the cover. "Darn, I need that book, I like the look of it." Another agrees, "Ah ... that's a good one."

"What helps you choose books?" I ask one grade four boy, hunting for books on a shelf. "You can tell a lot by the cover," he says.

A grade two child says you can tell good books, because they have good pictures "on the front."

But Fern sees that the pictures, although important, are not the only criteria for choosing a story. She picks up Snow White. She looks at all the pages of the book in order, and says to me and the little boy next to her: "It's a really good book, but I'm not going to take it cause it's got not very much colored pictures." Surprise! Fern does end up signing out this book, Snow White.

As children learn the importance of "reading" in adults' eyes, and in their own, they come to be almost apologetic in their picture looking.

A grade one boy for some time looks at his library books. He says "I like space books. I like all kinds of them." What does he like about them? "Pictures." Most honestly, he says, "I don't really read the words, cause they're too hard. I like to look at the space books."

Two little girls sit in the rocking chair looking at one book together. "We're _just_ looking at the pictures right now." They _admit_ this.

Despite this apologetic treatment of pictures by would-be readers, the illustrations are so important that just one picture can sum up the whole impression the child takes away from a book after listening to it, or reading it.

A grade one girl is approaching, book in hand. "What have you go there?" I ask. She flips through the book to a certain picture, a picture of a little boy holding a valentine. She says, "I like this 'cause he has his valentines with his own name."

One child brings the book, _Pecos Bill_ to me. He says "I'll show you what one I like." He refers to one illustration only, weaving the story around it, telling the story in relation to this one illustration.

At other times it seems that the pictures themselves, not the stories are the focus. Children in the library look at pictures, studying them together, wondering, commenting and exclaiming. Sometimes, it is like the children find in pictures some element of the real objects they represent.

My four-year-old niece, as I read a story to her, reaches out and strokes the bunnie's head in the illustration, and murmurs softly to him.

One little girl sits on the floor, looking at a beautiful book with black-and-white illustrations portraying cats in all their moods. I ask if I may join in the looking. She nods yes. We both "ooooo" and "aaahhh" at some of the pictures. Later I ask her "Do you have a cat?" She says, "No, I don't but I wish I had one. I wish we didn't live in an apartment ..." With this her voice trails off.

A grade two boy holds up two books, one of which is Twelve Dancing Princesses. I ask him, pointing at this book, "What's that book about?" The little boy and his friend next to him begin to giggle. They cover their faces with books. The little girl ahead of the two boys says in answer to my question about the book: "Nice pretty girls." She adds confidentially, "They were kissing the book." Now the boys are completely hidden from sight, and I only hear their giggles.

At other times, as children look at illustrations and think about them, it is as if they make discoveries, or form puzzles from the pictures.

The little girl who is reading her favorite part of "Let's Go to the Hospital to me, and who seems to enlarge upon the extent of her favorite part as long as I am attentively listening, suddenly covers the picture of a medical examination with her hand. She seriously says, "I can't show the boys this picture." Later she turns to a picture of the whole ward of patients and says abruptly to me "Where is she?" (the patient we read about) "I know where she is, but where is she?" She makes a puzzle

for me to solve for which she knows the answer, and seems genuinely surprised that I, too, can locate the detail she has singled out.

"I wonder what kind of engine that is?" a boy asks himself.

"How many people can sit in here?" Two children point at the pictures together.

A little girl is found sitting in a rocker, looking at The Little Red Hen page by page, in order. She points at the pigs in one picture. She comments to me that that picture is the same as the one on the cover. "Look," she presses her finger to the picture--as if she is touching the pigs, not pointing at them. She does the same thing when she turns to the cover.

Another grade two child looks at the book on the table in front of her. "Look at this!" She points out the fact that the illustration on the back cover is the same as one of the illustrations in the book. I ask "Why do you think they did that?" She says, "Because there are no words on the back."

Children relate to the pictures in different ways as they study them. One day, I am sitting at a low table as the kindergarten children choose their books. After a few moments, one boy, blonde and chubby-cheeked, comes to the table and sits beside me. I am amazed at how rapidly he surveys the details of the illustrations, and the relationships he sees between details on different pages. Things I do not piece together, at all, never mind so quickly. For instance, he notes, after looking at the cover (a picture of a mouse holding a small ABC block) and the cover a picture of two small mice carrying large blocks) "Big mouse with a little thing ..." He turns back to the cover,

then turns to the page. "Little mouse with a big thing." Later, after closing the back cover (which shows the back view of the mouse on the front cover) he says, "Look, that's the back and front of him."

During this time spent with the little boy and his ABC book, another little guy comes over to our table. Just before joining us, he exclaims and laughs, "The Red Race Car!" Sitting directly across the round table from my ABC friend and I, the newcomer immediately begins a recital of the story of the Little Red Race Car, holding the book so that I can see the pages. He turns the pages appropriately, and it seems as if he is very familiar with the book. He points at certain characters and discusses relationships in the story.

Soon after the recital of "The Red Race Car" begins, yet another little fellow comes to join us at the table. He has a cartoon-type book which features a ghost. He encourages me to look at his book several times, and makes loud sound effects, as if the pictures are actually happening in this room, as if he is taking part in the action. "Whoosh, Bam!" "I'd kick a ghost in the bum!"

So the three kindergarteners concurrently attempt to involve me in a limited way in their particular way of reading the pictures. One boy offers illustrations and comments on their relationships, the next tells a story with reference to the pictures, and the third shows pictures and makes sound effects. A bewildered researcher tries to record it all. (Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1974), in her diary says, "It's always when things happen that we have no time to record them.")

For a time, the child is absorbed in the picture. There is something for him in it, and there is something of him, of what he knows in it. It's not "just looking at the picutres." In losing oneself in an illustration, does one not also gain some understanding for and of himself?

> What the infant is doing in knowing is endowing sensations with meaning; that is, converting raw sensations in perceptions. In short, he is engaged in an active process of organization, of understanding, of becoming aware. It is by this kind of "knowing" that the child "becomes." In this manner, by discriminating the other half of himself, the infant becomes himself. But the distinction is not the individuation of separation, but rather of identification, often of losing oneself within the object that one knows very well has a unique and independent existence. One comes to rejoice in that uniqueness as an enrichment both for the other and of oneself. It is the development of this double process that enables us in all later periods of our lives to identify ourselves, to lose ourselves, to become for a time whatever we may admire--a landscape, a painting, a poem, the picturesque, music, someone we love, a friend, whatever. To know is to be ... and to become and to be involved (Montagu, 1981:143).

The Lonely???? Good Company of Books

> All the child's needs are directed toward satisfaction, fulfillment (Montagu, 1981:130).

> I can quite truthfully say that I never lifted a hand unless for someone; never took up a brush or pen, a sheet of music or a spade, never pursued a thought without the motivation of trying to make someone love me (Ashton-Warner, 1974:206).

Part of our fulfillment, satisfaction is love, and love is communicated, mutually telegraphed in a sharing between people. It is true that Rodriguez (1982) speaks of "the lonely good company of books," and we can understand this feeling, looking at our personal experience. There is comfort in books that we can reach out to even when we are "alone."

The little Metis boy just today has come to this school, a new school. This morning he cries when he comes to the new class and meets a new teacher. This afternoon, more composed, he sits cross-legged on the carpeted floor of the school library, studying one particular page of the book Madeline. He is looking at the last illustration in the book which depicts all the little girls in the orphanage happily going out for their walk, each holding a puppy on a leash. Gently the little boy runs his finger from each little orphan girl to the puppy she holds on a leash. I ask him, "What makes this a good book?" He says, "My teacher read it. ... My other teacher did." Is this book a comfort, a "security blanket" on a trying day? I am so glad he found this book in his new library today.

For the children, part of the lonely good company of books comes in looking at books that are familiar to them. Anyone who has read to a child at bedtime knows that there are favorites, and that re-reading does not diminish the child's enjoyment of the book. In fact it seems, that in these cases familiarity might breed content. Perhaps the solitary "re-reading" of such a book is not really lonely at all.

It is not so surprising that on every occasion as I watch a librarian reading a book to a class in the library, that particular book is sought after come book exchange time.

"It has nice pictures and Susan read it to us."

"I like this book, my teacher read it to us."

"I took out the kitty cat two times."

A grade four girl holds the book Bambi in her hands as she stands by a shelf in the library. I ask if she has read this book before. Apparently her mother has read it to her. About a year ago. Then she borrowed it from the public library herself. She says "When he was a baby running around and stuff it was really interesting. He was cute when he was a baby." It doesn't bother her that there are no pictures. And she takes Bambi today.

A kindergarten boy in a red and white striped T-shirt tells me the story of the "Red Race Car" as he sits across the table from me. He has obviously seen the book before, and relates the story with great familiarity. Immediately upon ending this recital, he jumps up, holding the books and walks away, saying "If I can't find a better book than this, I'm going to take this one." He holds on to this old favorite just in case. Later a red and white T-shirt flashes by me. I see that he no longer has "The Red Race Car" in hand. "Oh, you didn't choose the Little Red Race Car?" "No," he pauses, looking at the book he has in his hand, "I don't want to take the same book twice, twice, twice ... everytime." On this point he launches into a full account and recital of this newly chosen book, Jack and the Beanstalk. Again, he is very familiar with the story and uses elaborate literary language as he tells the story. "Down, down down went Jack, down the beanstalk." I ask, "Oh, so you've seen this story before?" "Yeah, lots of times." "Where did you see it?" "My teacher read it to us." "Did she read you this exact book?" "No, not this one, but the same story."

As the children choose books, they often return to those that have given them pleasure, or have been read to them in a particular time

and/or place. Or they turn to books which deal with a subject matter which they have read about before, or learned something of from TV, movies, mom or dad's hobbies, or studies in school.

In one school library a poster proclaims "Have you seen the movie? Now, read the book!" It seems that children are eager to do so. Much excitement is created by finding this familiar subject matter and plot in a different format. Familiar subject matter seems important as I listen to the words of the children:

"I like space books. I like all kinds of them."

"I like books about deers."

"I'm taking this one. I saw it before, but ... you can tell it ... I saw it first but I'm taking it again."

I ask one little girl who flips purposefully through books on a shelf "What kind of book are you looking for?" "Pussycats. I <u>always</u> look for pussycats." She carries a skipping rope handle in her mouth. "Doesn't look like there are any pussycats," she comments morosely.

In a sense the familiar book can be returned to as a safe, predictable companion, a dance partner you can enjoy again and again, his footsteps do not stray. In this way, a familiar book, in plot or subject matter is like the kite in Leonard Cohen's poem (1968)

> A kite is a victim you are sure of
> You love it because it pulls
> gentle enough to call you master,
> strong enough to call you fool;
> because it lives
> like a desperate trained falcon
> in the high sweet air,
> and you can always haul it down
> to tame it in your drawer.

A kite is a fish you have already caught
in a pool where no fish come,
so you play him carefully and long,
and hope he won't give up,
or the wind die down.

A kite is the last poem you've written,
so you give it to the wind,
but you don't let it go
until someone finds you
something else to do.

Like the kite in the poem, a familiar book "is a fish you have already caught," and you play him "carefully and long" until someone finds you something else." There is joy in the dance right up to the point where you let the kite go.

Sometimes as adults we get "bored" reading the same book again and again, to a child. Parents at the public library say "We read that before." "You took that book before." Can we come to understand that we too crave familiarity and that books do not decrease in pleasure after one reading, anymore than a kite does after one flying? Adult readers cherish certain bits of literature through their lives. Children too, in their yet-short lives can come to a book, read it again and experience it anew. And the pleasure of the dance is there as long as familiar contentment is there.

This is not to say that a child, or every child reads and rereads every book. Of course not! My little kindergarten friend said "I don't want to read it twice, twice, twice .... everytime!"

> It is reassuring to realize that your own experiences are not entirely unique. But it is better still to have new adventures. Few adults can read a book in which everything is totally strange. Neither do adults wish to read books in which everything is something they already know. Children are the same (Karl, 1970:9).

Sometimes it is the format of the book which a child seeks as a constant: a series book, or a certain type of story.

> Another summer I determined to real all the novels of Dickens. Reading his fat novels, I loved the feeling I got--after the first hundred pages--of being at home in a fictional world where I knew the names of the characters and cared about what was going to happen to them (Rodriguez, 1982:63).

One grade four girl says "I like mysteries. They're exciting, leave you in suspense."

Another grade four student says she reads mysteries, "but sometimes they get too much, too boring." Is she about to let the kite go?

I recall the advice of a sister to her younger brother in this light. "It's boring after you read it for a while ..." (she pauses to look at his face) "... but it's good." He may need to hold the taught kite string now, even though she has given her kite to the wind. It is the view that has changed, not the book. Can we do the same as this young girl when we are tempted to comment on children's choices for independent reading?

> It has taken me most of my adult life to understand that the very characteristics of series books that offend me most are what make the books so appealing to young readers (Broderick, 1977:23).

The "lonely good company of books" is a comfort to some. But there are others on the dance floor, and the pleasure of sharing is a pleasure that may be experienced while choosing books. Sometimes a need for sharing is expressed to the "whole world," inviting response from anyone, at other times the sharing is "person to person ... in person" (Goodman, 1979:152). Sharing may be the "main event" with the maintaining of this human closeness providing a focus for all around it. Other times the

sharing is gentle, understood, a comfort appreciated within the context of a larger situation.

I say there is pleasure in the sharing, in the fulfillment of this need. But what of a time and space where your call is not answered, where sharing is out of your grasp?

The little kindergarten boy catches my attention as he attempts to secure everyone's. He wants to share everything he sees. His state is agitated. "Come here everybody--look! Come here! Look! Come here, you guys, come here!!!!!" They don't. He is eager to show the cover of the book he has in his hand, but when they don't come to look, he continues to survey the cover himself. A little girl walks by. His big chance! "Look what I found!!!" He pounces on her. She gives the book a moment's cool contemplation, but states flatly, "I saw it before." He puts the book back on the shelf, and says out loud "Oooooooh, there's lots of good books here." The little girl continues on her way. The little boy looks, exclaiming to himself, looking around for reaction. A fellow kindergartener walks by. The little boy is quick to seize his opportunity, "I want a book ... lookit, lookit this!" She shows the passerby a book and then throws it back on the shelf, looking for response. Again he finds himself alone. By himself, he selects and puts aside two books. To himself, but still looking around for reply, he says "I want this one. I don't want this one. Which book I taking? Ookit this!!!!!" He is holding a very large picture book--almost too big for him to open. He holds it out for the world to look at.

With this little boy the need for sharing is great and intense. The moment in which sharing takes place need not be so intense to be satisfying.

A man stands at a terminal in the adult section of the public library. Hippity-hopping across the library comes a little girl, small purse swinging from her arm, book in hand, she comes smiling all the way. She stands near the man at the terminal. He looks down at her. She smiles and holds up her book. "See Daddy," she says smiling. "A witch." "Yeah," says Daddy. "A witch," she repeats, and turns on the spot, skipping across the library, back to the children's section.

Of the children I see and browse with, some are most desirous of sharing, so much so that it seems the books are the objects which they use as an aid in fulfilling this need. I get the impression that any other object might do, but that a book has an added advantage, extending the time in which "togethering" takes place. Several children seem content as long as I am close and appear to be listening to their extended recitals of the books they look at. Children at these times do not indicate to me that they desire any real input from me, that rather, I am the listener and they are the story teller, and that we are near. So I am somehow able to listen to three kindergarteners at once to their satisfaction. (At least, they stay to the end of their respective stories!) They braid their stories about me, three different strands for me, somehow one to one for them. So the little girl in grade two continues to embellish and expand her "favorite part" of Let's Go to the Hospital until she reads to me and comments on the whole book, page by page, pausing to lure me on from time to time with "and my really

favorite part is ..." She speaks to me in this way, keeping me near. And one does have to hold an adult to keep them near, they are in demand, and apt to wander. Their attention drifts so quickly when they are teachers. Can't they sit still even for a moment?

So books can help to draw another near. Even in the choosing of books this is apparent.

The little blonde haired boy in grade one. Only last week we looked at a book together, a book I had pulled off the shelf. He eyes me speculatively as he listens to the story the librarian reads this day. As soon as the librarian finishes reading, the little blonde haired boy comes directly to me. "Where's that book again? Where's that book again?" He looks at me, saying with his eyes, "Remember me?" Out loud he says "Remember the one you showed me before?" We walk to the shelf where we saw it last, looking together. We can't find it. On the shelf, I find a book with similar subject, and I offer it as a possibility. He looks at the cover and says "Oh yeah!!!" and hurries right over to sign the book out. Later, his class is leaving the library, and still this little boy stands close to me, not really talking, "hanging around." After a while he motions that I should bend over so that he can whisper to me, "I'm waiting for my card." So he stands by me. Now the little girl-class librarian is preparing to leave, and she says pointedly to the little boy, "_____, you're <u>supposed</u> to go back to class." He smiles briefly, as if caught, but still, unashamed. He leaves saying to me, "See you next time!" Almost out of sight, almost around the corner, he turns and adds, "Bye!"

There is a way to draw others near. You may say "Lookit, lookit!" like the kindergarten boy who has no success one day. Like an author, a child who browses through a book, may need to put something "in there" for the person they wish to share with.

One of the kindergarten children, a little girl, sits on the floor, looking page by page through a book from front to back. She stops at a page for a few moments and says to the little girl next to her: "Look at this one." No reply. "Look at this picture!" Again, no response. "Look at this. It's fairy." The little neighbor looks now. With this, the little girl points at the picture she's been surveying, "Look at this--her shoes!" She whistles softly as she points "wwwht whew." She dampens her finger on her tongue to turn the page and continues in more solitary reading.

Other times, more than story teller and listener, more than drawing close, there is companionship. As companions relating in a particular space and time, perhaps the music of the dance sounds similarly for each. There is harmony in this companionship that speaks of people who are in tune, who don't have to be drawn in.

Two small boys stand side by side looking at books on the top shelf. They are looking together; in synchronized motion they drop to their knees as they peruse a lower shelf. There seems to be quiet comradeship in the act--no speaking, but quietly flipping each book over until it rests diagonally on the last book they looked at together.

Two grade four girls rock rhythmically in the large rocking chair today. They are reading a book, Shirleybird, which is composed in a rhyme with surrounding black and white illustrations. They are taking

turns reading to each other, alternating pages, and this seems to be a most satisfactory arrangement for them. As one reads,the other rocks the chair in rhythm to the cadence of the verse. I ask, "Is it good to share a book?" The one little girl says, "Yes, it makes it more interesting--cause we use expression and stuff."

Two grade four girls browse through books while seated on a small step ladder-bench. One sits on the top step, the other on the bottom rung, with her legs resting in the middle of the ladder. Thus, front to front, they browse in silent amiable companionship for the duration of the library period.

Everywhere in the library, children browse with fellows, usually in pairs. Sometimes solo dancers edge closer to other solitary ones on the dance floor for a moment, and then waltz off again. There is coming and going, ebb and tide. And yet, always, it seems, that were more than two or three collect, the emphasis on the book is less than in those smaller, nearer groups of two or three. Sometimes as the group gets larger, the rough-housing begins, the chase ensues and the book is often cast aside. The music changes, and the dancers respond with different steps. And for some, even alone, the music speaks of a dance that cannot take place with a book, as long as a much greater need exists.

I watch this boy, a grade four student, several times in the library. Finally, on the day of the "Book Fair," where students are writing up orders for books they would like to buy, I am drawn to really listen to Jason. Jason stands for a minute with another fellow, talking about a book. Within seconds Jason says "I'm getting this ... Look at

this, aircraft! Oh, yeah! Oh, look at this! Look at this!" The other fellow doesn't look, instead says "Hey, Jas, look at this." Jason says, "Oh, freak me out!" Jason punches the air with his fist, and his companion draws away from this action, holding out one hand to fend off a possible blow. Jason's friend says "Come on, Jason ..." He leaves as Jason punches the air again. Immediately, Jason begins, "Mr. J_____, Mr. J_____, Mr. J_____, Mr. J_____." Mr. J. is talking to another student a few steps away, and turns to Jason inquiringly. Jason says "Where's _____?" (title of a book) "I saw it last night." They have a quiet conversation, and both move away from that spot, in two separate directions. Jason moves to another table. He stands, looking briefly at the books there on the table. Almost immediately he snatches a book in his hand and reaches out to a girl nearby. "Hey, Laurie ... want this?" He offers her a horse book. She nods no. Jason mechanically leafs through books, for a moment he stacks the books with ones of like size. Suddenly, as a girl comes by he says, "Hey, give me a pencil!" She does and he leans far out in front of her, writing on his order form. He says to another child nearby, "Hey, you're going to get Dinosaur World." No reply. To another child he says, "Hey, man, where's my pencil?" No reply comes. He leaves his order form, and walks over to yet another student. "Where is _____? Oh, man! I'm getting that one." The child only looks up for a moment when Jason speaks, he does not answer. Jason goes to a student who is holding a book, reading it, and Jason says to him, "I wouldn't buy this book for a thousand dollars!" He says something to the librarian, Mr. J. as he goes by. He moves to yet another table. Loudly he proclaims, "Oh, yeah! Big Foot!" He looks

around him and at me after this loud statement, but even though he is loud, no one says anything. There is no reaction. Jason makes a loud burping noise. He looks around, and again, at me. He smiles at me across the room. Vaguely he returns to looking at books. Suddenly he begins "trumpeting" with his voice and pantomiming the action of the trumpeting. He looks around. Jason continues this rambling for some time, eventually resorting to talking to himself, watching peers, rolling his book order form in his hand and soliciting an eraser. Finally he hands the task of writing the order, washing his hands of it, to a motherly little girl in his class. She shakes her head as he does so, and softly she says as he walks away, "Doesn't even got a pencil."

For Jason it seems there can be no involvement, no pleasure in the invitation or the dance with book-partner. He needs other partners, the other dancers on the floor. He does not share their music, and does not harmonize with their movements and this makes his need even more. For Jason, "the lonely good company of books" cannot even for an instant approach the close good company of people.

At times, rather than an overture of others that ends in no satisfaction, a sharing of a book can be that overture that stands for the possibility of more, much more than the sharing of a book. In Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, we read this description of the reaction of a child to an offered reading from an adult:

> I was liked, and what a difference it made. I was respected not as Mrs. H_____'s grandchild or B_____'s sister, but for just being Marguerite Johnson.
>
> Childhood's logic never asks to be proved (all conclusions are absolute). I didn't question why Mrs. Flowers had singled

> me out for attention, nor did it occur to me that Momma might have asked her to give me a little talking to. All I cared about was that she had made tea cookies for me, and read to me from her favorite book. It was enough to prove that she liked me (1969:85).

The urge I have to "gift" a book, a special book to a particular child. The pleased look on the face of a student as I agree to read the book she likes "after The Little Prince." Again, the ebb and tide, but of the same ocean. We want to be liked, we take pleasure from the gift and the giving.

So I give the gift of caring, as I choose yet another book about the Klondike Gold Rush for my husband from the shelves at the public library. (He liked the last one). He accepts my gift, reading and admiring my understanding of him. And as I give I take the pleasure of sharing, of being liked.

A grade five boy, Kenny, who knows me from before, comes into the school library one day after school and goes directly to a particular shelf. There he browses for a minute, and comes away with a book. As he passes me on his way to the checkout desk he says, "I'm taking out a book for Wendy (his sister). She likes horses."

A grade four girl is signing out books. I ask "What have you got there?" "This is for my brother and this is for me." "Do you always pick one for him?" "Yup, sometimes I pick two easy books and my mom reads them to my stupid little brother!!!" She waltzes out of the library happily. He's not so stupid; sister's look betrays her words.

A grade four girl comments, "I'm taking out this one for my mom. She likes books about the Queen."

And so the pleasures of choosing and looking at books comes to be less "in" the book for some than others, or from time to time the emphasis changes. The dancers are moving, always moving through time and through space. Like celestial bodies, their rhythms and movements can appear simultaneously to world-bound observers as random happenings and structured events.

Becoming and Books

There is always a lot of talk about becoming. We want to become "better" people. We want children to become more like the adults we want to become. We think we know what is becoming of others, from our viewpoint, or what is becoming to them. Still, like dancers, we are always moving through time and space, we are continually moving, stepping, gliding. We judge our own dancing by looking around, by trying to see ourselves in other places. We learn about ourselves by finding something of ourselves in those around us, and only in this way do we identify what we are becoming.

> It is by this kind of "knowing" that the child "becomes." In this manner, by discriminating the other half of himself, the infant becomes himself. But the distinction is not the individuation of separation, but rather of identification, often of losing oneself within the object that one knows very well has a unique and independent existence (Montagu, 1981:143).

In becoming, in the realization that one is becoming, there is also a pleasure, a satisfaction.

One sense of becoming comes from revisiting a former time and self.

It is interesting to watch the grade five class as they select books to read to grade one children. One girl picks up Norman the Doorman, and laughs out loud as she looks at it. Does she remember it, the way she read it once, or is she reacting now? One girl comments to another, "That's too hard." Too hard for her to read to the grade one child? More likely, I feel, "too hard" for her to read when she was in grade one? I ask one boy, at the desk, "What do grade ones like in a book?" "Well," he says thoughtfully, "Can't be too wild, but can't be too sophisticated." Sophisticated? Looking back, we all like to think that we are more ... more than we were before.

Jason, in his search at the "Book Fair," comes across a number of picture books. He stops at the "little kid's" books and makes fun of one title he sees there. "Piggies at play, Piggies at play," he mimics loudly. He looks directly at me.

One doesn't always know the dimensions of the revisitation to an earlier day, but there is a hint that it is there.

The little grade two girl industriously pushes out the books, "evening them up" on the shelves. Suddenly, she pulls a little book off the shelf. There is a lizard on the cover of the book. "This is a good one." She shows me. "Salamander ... I caught one salamander in my old school. My old school in the country. I found it on the road. It was dusty. And took it out for show and tell. And my teacher said I should let it out. Then I let it go, let it go on the road." The remembrance flows. "I'm going to take that. I could take that book home. I'm trying to look for a very good book. This is a very good book." She looks shyly at me with downcast eyes, saying, "Always when I'm at the

library I have to go to the bathroom." I think she "held on" too long. She offers up her book to me, leaves it in my safekeeping. (It is a good, very good book, so wouldn't someone else take it while she is in the bathroom?)

> A children's book, then--any book for that matter--is a packaged expression of some aspect of life as it is--and something more: an idea, a viewpoint, a starting point. It is not a finished, complete, didactic expression, but a beginning to be thought about and built on ... discovering many things that are not really a part of the books at all, but a product of the authors' beginnings and the readers' thinking (Karl, 1970:6).

> But do they know what they themselves are? Is that not what they are reading books to find out? The best of novels are only scenarios, to be completed by the reader's own experience. They do not give us feeling: they draw out such feelings as we have (Davies, 1960:13).

And so I know that my niece, Angie, in hearing about the "land of memory," draws on experience, on feeling that I, with almost eight times her hours of life can only imagine. And so I can listen and wonder.

The little grade one girl approaches. "What have you got there?" (I am always asking, although I vow to let things be.) She flips through to a certain picture, a little boy holding a valentine in his hand. The boy is in a classroom, the desks and trappings of a Valentine's celebration is about him. She says, pointing to this picture, "I like this." What makes her like that? She considers her answer, "Cause he has his valentines with his own name."

Then there are things we know now. We didn't always. Like what a girl likes, and what a boy does. A child takes pride in showing this knowledge while choosing books.

My niece, Angie, has a bookshelf full of books in her upstairs room. On one shelf reside all the "Tell Me Why" books that her mother and aunt read as girls. They are informational books, many of which are books about fish and snakes and dinosaurs and other crawly creatures, some of which reputedly make up little boys: "Snakes and snails and puppy-dogs' tails." Angie points at these books, and says "I like these." Absently, I reply, "They're nice." Angie sees the emptiness of my statement, "No, they're yucky," she says.

A grade five girl choosing a book for a grade one boy says that she must find Cowboy-Sam. "It has to be, cause he's a boy," she says with some disdain. And that resolves the issue!

Another little girl points at a book about fish and says "Ughh!!!" She makes a face, and squeezes up her shoulders in distaste. "That's for boys, not for me."

One day a father brings his pet tarantula to my grade two class for a visit. He suggests that I should hold out my arm, and that the tarantula will climb, tickling a bit, that's all, with his little furry invisibly clawed feet. As the spider obligingly crawls, a little girl in my class is disapproving: "Mrs. Thomas, girls don't play with spiders!"

Boy or girl, you have your own tastes. "I like space books." "Mommy, please don't read that one tonight at bedtime because I don't want it." "Mysteries." "This book is too scary, I don't like scary books." "I love this, I was right to pick this book." "I like books about deers."

The little Metis boy, now more secure in his new school comes right over to me this afternoon and says, holding his book up to my face. "You

know what like?" (The book is You're in Love, Charlie Brown.) Safely, I guess, "Charlie Brown?" "No, I'll show you what I like." He flips to a page where all the characters are displayed, and looks at me. Checks my expression. "Not Charlie Brown?" I ask. He must decide that I need another clue, so subtly he slides his thumb up on Snoopy. "Snoopy?" "Yeah, I like Snoopy."

And there is my niece who periodically fills me in on her "favoritest book right now."

You know that other people make different choices, sometimes you can even guess what they like, or find a book for them. You know you are you, and that others can be "their own selves" too.

Two boys discuss their respective books at the signout desk. One comments, "Hey, listen to this, he became a Toronto All-Star." The other points at his book. "You like this one better, right? I know this ..." (the one he holds) "... is a good one." "I like Ken Dryden." Yes, he does like the one about Ken Dryden better. But it's okay. In fact, it's kind of nice to know what your friend likes, and that you know.

And you know what you can do. The honesty of children's words comes through when you listen, try to listen as they speak, tell us "where they are." Reading, really reading is important, and children constantly judge their dance, adjust their dance in reference to the others on the dance floor. The books they choose can signal to others their accomplishment.

"What kind of book are you looking for?" I ask the little girl on crutches. "An easy reading book." "What is a book like that like?" "Has words that are easy to read."

Two grade two girls are looking together at books on a shelf. "Oh, you should take this one, it's good." "It's easy, not good." "It be good." What is "easy" for one is "good" to another, and not necessarily "easy."

Fern is looking through the beloved book basket by the librarian's rocking chair. She flips through one book and quickly rejects it, "Oh, that one's too easy!" Uninitiated as yet, I ask, "How can you tell?" "Cause, I can read it." Another little girl walks by and confirms, "That is easy." One sometimes needs to explain, as one grade four girl says, "But, well, they're really easy, but I like them."

I ask one little girl what is really good about the book she chooses. "I can read this book, all of it, so my mom doesn't have to read half of it." She offers this to me in her softest little voice, wistfully looking at the book as she speaks the words.

A grade one boy wanders by a table where another boy is reading out loud. The passerby is adamant: "Don't tell me, I know the words." He looks at the book as the other child reads, now silently.

"I don't really read the words 'cause they're too hard."

The contest leader: "I'm ahead of everyone." His admirer, "Yeah, he's read one hundred books."

The grade one boy, sitting on the small step-ladder says to the little girl who holds a hardcover book, "That's big and that's hard." She says, "I wanna take this one." One-up-book-ship?

"What makes that a good book?" I ask of a child. "I looked at the words and they're easy to read so I'm taking them."

Reading is serious business, the work of children at school. Achievement in reading is not something to make light of, or to lie about. You cannot take credit for reading if you really don't do it yourself. I notice this, talking with the children, and listening to them and the adults around them. Parents, teachers, librarians say "Remember when we read this book?" "Let's read this." They involve the children in the reading act with their words but children don't do this. They are honest. Listening is not really reading in their eyes.

"Have you read it before?" I ask, meaning but not communicating "do you know the book from before?" The grade one child says, "No." There is a long pause, and then the child adds, "But my teacher read it to us."

The little pony-tailed girl shyly shows me her book. I ask her what she thinks the book is about. She shows me three or four illustrations and says "He keeps on asking people." "What?" I wonder out loud. "I don't know." "Are you reading the book so you can find out?" The little girl replies, "I'm not, my mom is."

Two grade fours look through a very thick book. One child speaks loudly, "I did! I read this one."

A grade three boy says to his teacher as they leave the library: "I have The Star Wars Book. I only have eighteen pages left." His teacher asks "Are you reading the whole thing?" "My mom started reading it but ..." (they move from my range).

Even the echoes of the kindergarten children rephrase a reply to my question "Have you read this book before?" into "I took the kitty-cat out two times." "I took it out _____ times." "I took _____ out _____ times."

I speak to the girl in grade four about Bambi. I ask if she's read it before. Her mother read it to her a year ago, then she borrowed it from the public library herself.

As one girl surveys the library card in the back pocket of the book, I ask what she is looking for. She is looking to see whether or not another person had really "taken it out."

Only the very youngest children say "Mommy, I want to read them in the car." My four-year-old niece says "I have to read them, I haven't been here in a long time." But then reading is not their work yet, it is their play. (Sardello, cited in Hunsberger [1982], says "reading becomes an experience we undergo rather than an experience we control." Is this not the way of school?)

But sometimes, you can just try a book on for size. It's not really dishonest, you are just pretending for now, to see how it feels.

The grade four boy has a thick, very thick and "printy" book about optical illusions. He studies the cover illustration carefully. Then he signs it out. He flips the pages rapidly with his thumb. It is a thick book! "Speedreading!" he laughs, running his thumb through all those pages.

As one little grade one girl leaves the library she smiles and says "Look at this big book!" She holds the big, thick book, holds it out with both hands toward me.

The boy in the public library comes to his mom with his selected book. She says bluntly, "You can't read that book." He knows, but says "I can read some of it." "You can't read this." The boy looks as she examines the book. "I can read some of it." He's telling the truth, but mom can't see his honorable words. "You can't read this."

I tutor a thirteen-year-old boy for a time. One day he brings a James Bond paperback to show me. He has marked his place at about page nine or ten, and tells me that he has been reading it for days to get to that point. I wonder at this, silently. I know it must be difficult for him, teaching him, I know. Finally the wondering vanishes from my mind with his statement, "It's an adult book, and hard, but ... it's worth it."

So the nuances and pleasures of the invitation, of the dance, the shadows and brightness of the music around us, surround me in my study, in my becoming with the people around me. As I write I am one with Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1974:215) as I try to "give the picture, the conglomeration of imagery that has been banking up before the inner eye, waiting and pushing for expression. And the order will be its own. An order of emotional importance." Life itself is going on about me, and life is many things, but never simple. The dance goes on. My listening continues, and my eye for melody is becoming ... more ...

As the kindergarten children scatter from the story telling, one little girl skips to the bookshelves, humming and hopping, humming ...

"Now we pick a book!
Now we pick a book!"

VII. POST SCRIPT

As pages are turned
And choices made,
Each to his own music dances.

I realize, now
How different the tunes.
    How the melody
    Surrounds each of us
    In our own way;
    Sounds
    Of distant and near times
    Play for us
    And make us what we are.

And, we <u>are</u> ready to choose
What we need.
The invitation is accepted,
The dance begins.

Knowing this,
How can I let be,
And yet be part?
    Because I have watched, appreciating,
    I am now ready to choose
    A dance.

        No, my partners have not been changed
        By my readiness ...
        But
        Can our dance, teacher and child,
            Harmonize,
                Become ... more ...?

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